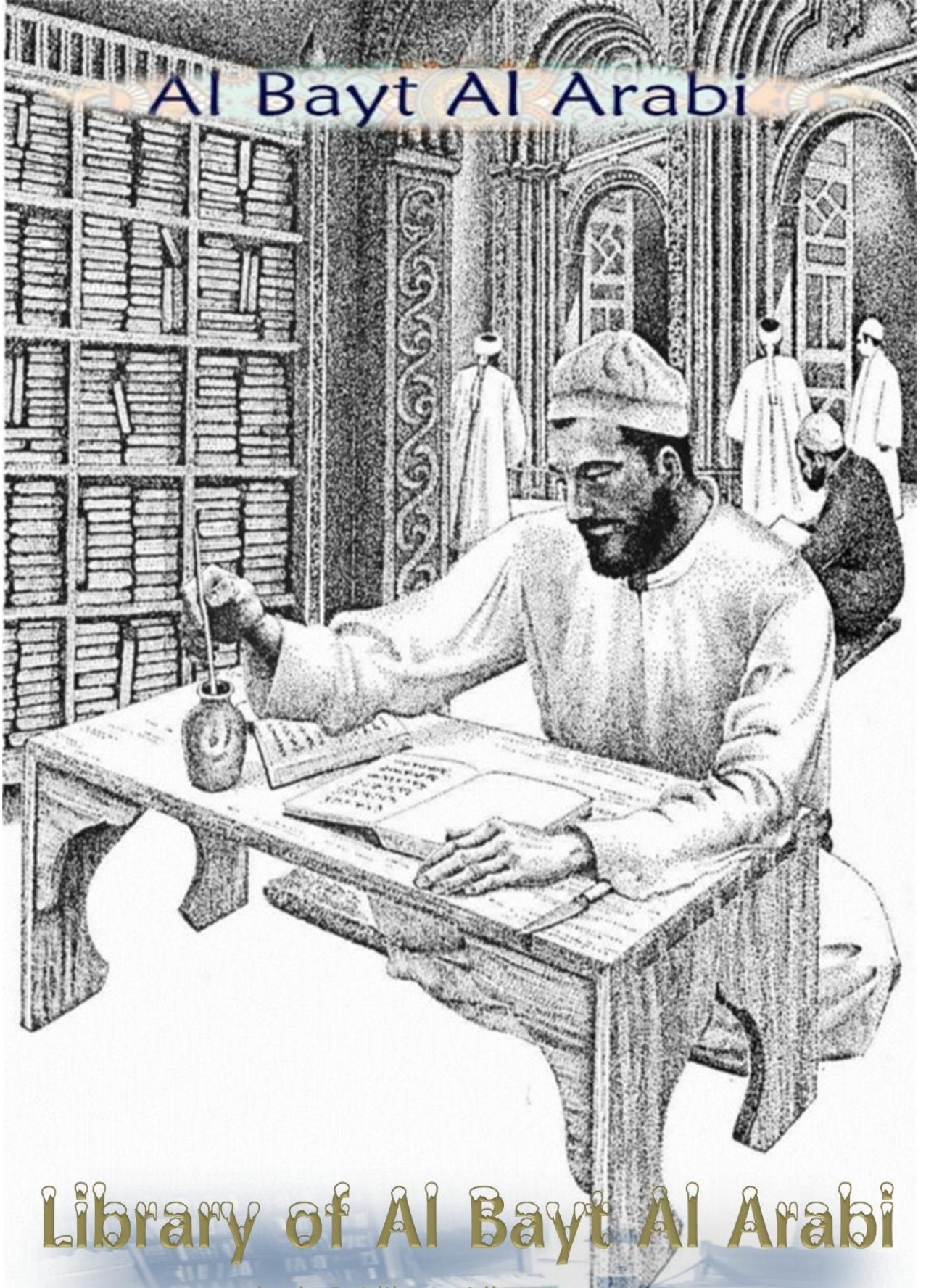


Efraim Karsh

Soviet Policy towards Syria since 1970



Al Bayt Al Arabi



Library of Al Bayt Al Arabi

huda@sidibousaidlanguages.com

SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA SINCE 1970

Also by Efraim Karsh

THE CAUTIOUS BEAR: Soviet Military Engagement in Middle East
Wars in the Post-1967 Era

THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: A Military Analysis

THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: Impact and Implications (*editor*)

NEUTRALITY AND SMALL STATES

THE SOVIET UNION AND SYRIA

Soviet Policy towards Syria since 1970

Efraim Karsh

*Lecturer in War Studies, King's College
University of London*

Palgrave Macmillan

ISBN 978-1-349-11484-9 ISBN 978-1-349-11482-5 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-11482-5

© Efraim Karsh, 1991

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1991

All rights reserved. For information, write:

Scholarly and Reference Division,

St. Martin's Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010

First published in the United States of America in 1991

ISBN 978-0-312-05310-9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Karsh, Efraim.

Soviet policy towards Syria since 1970/Efraim Karsh.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-312-05310-9

1. Soviet Union—Foreign relations — Syria. 2. Syria — Foreign relations—Soviet Union. 3. Soviet Union — Foreign relations—1945–
4. Soviet Union—Military relations—Syria. 5. Syria—Military relations—Soviet Union. I. Title.

DK67.5.S95K37 1991

327.4705691'09'047 — dc20

90-42640

CIP

For Matan

Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	1
 PART I THE STRUCTURE OF SOVIET-SYRIAN RELATIONS	
1 Moscow and Damascus: A Patron-Client Relationship?	11
2 Soviet-Syrian Relations: The Military Dimension	34
3 The Economics of Soviet Policy towards Syria	52
 PART II THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA	
4 The Formative Years, 1970-73	63
5 War and Disengagement	74
6 Lebanon	99
7 Towards a Bilateral Treaty	109
8 From Crisis to War	127
9 The Post-Brezhnev Interregnum	147
10 Gorbachev and the Syrians	163
<i>Conclusions</i>	178
<i>Notes</i>	183
<i>Appendices</i>	212
<i>Appendix 1 The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics and the Syrian Arab Republic</i>	212
<i>Appendix 2 The Soviet Proposal for a Middle East Peace Settlement, 29 July 1984</i>	215
<i>Appendix 3 Mikhail Gorbachev's Dinner Speech Honouring Asad, 24 April 1987</i>	217
<i>Bibliography</i>	221
<i>Index</i>	230

List of Tables

2.1 Major weapons systems used by the Syrian armed forces: October 1973 and May 1975	38
2.2 Expansion of the Syrian armed forces: October 1979 and mid-1982	40
2.3 Expansion of the Syrian armed forces: 1982–9	43
3.1 Soviet trade with Syria: 1955–85	56

Acknowledgements

Of the many people who have helped me throughout the preparation of this book there are two to whom I am particularly indebted: to Alex Pravda who encouraged me to embark on this study and supported it in numerous ways; and to Margot Light who convinced me to restructure the book at a very advanced stage of writing. Special debts of gratitude are also due to Charles Tripp, Philip Sabin, Inari Rautsi, Jane O. Davies, Rachel Denber and Roni Bregman, all of whom read the manuscript in part or in whole and made many useful suggestions. Finally, Ambassador Richard Murphy was kind enough to share with me from his vast experience in Syrian and Middle Eastern affairs.

Parts of the book have appeared elsewhere in a different and abridged form. This book originated in a research paper written under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs and published by Routledge. A preliminary version of the discussion in Chapter 1 was published in the December 1989 issue of the *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*. Permission for expanding this material and incorporating it into the book is gratefully acknowledged.

Needless to say, the responsibility for any errors that may remain is mine and mine alone.

London, March 1990

EFRAIM KARSH

Introduction

Geopolitical factors constitute the main point of reference for any analysis of Soviet policy towards the Middle East. To Russia, latterly the Soviet Union, the Middle East is not just another Third World area; it is *the area*, for no reason other than it is the only part of the Third World immediately adjoining Russian territory, and as such a vital component of the USSR's rimland, posing both grave risks and considerable opportunities to its national security and economic well-being.¹ The USSR's fundamental interest in the Middle East has therefore been essentially identical (though less intense) with the one held in its immediate European neighbours – Finland, the Baltic states, the Balkans before the Second World War, and Central Europe since then – namely, the attainment of a stable and safe frontier in order to minimize potential threats emanating from all these contiguous territories. Stability in this context means both the prevention of external great-power intervention and the preservation of a benevolent local environment. In the case of the Middle East, this interest was further reinforced by Russia's long-standing desire to control the straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles in order to provide an outlet for its naval activities in the rest of the world as well as to block the passage of European warships into the Black Sea.²

This geopolitical reality illustrates the fundamental difference between Soviet interest in the Middle East and that of any other great power: whereas Western interest in the Middle East, however vital, is purely circumstantial, Soviet interest is of a structural nature; whereas Western interest in the area is confined to the global level, the USSR has viewed the Middle East in predominantly regional terms. This approach is well reflected in the fact that the Russians have never viewed the region adjacent to their southern border as a unified whole but have rather made a clear distinction between their immediate neighbours, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan (defined as the *Srednii Vostok*, the Middle East) and the rest of the region which they call the Near East (*Blizhni, Vostok*).

This is not to deny the relevance of global considerations in the making of Soviet policy towards the Middle East, particularly in the postwar system with its intensifying superpower competition for assets in the Third World. After all, it is the overall perception of

threats (and opportunities) which determines the relative importance of various sectors along a state's rimland; and for quite a long time (at least since the decay of the Ottoman Empire) the main potential threat to Russia's southern borders has come from external, and not indigenous, actors. Nevertheless, due to its regional perspective, Soviet policy towards the Middle East has revealed far greater constancy and far less dependency on the fluctuations of global events than Western, and in particular American, policies.

Indeed, it is the geopolitical factor which, by and large, accounts for the lack of Soviet interest in the Arab world until the mid-1950s. Lying further to the south and not contiguous to Soviet territory, these countries were insignificant by comparison with those states adjoining Soviet territory. True, the Arab world has undeniable geostrategic and economic advantages: it occupies a considerable land mass, sits astride waterways of strategic importance and is blessed with abundant deposits of oil. But since the existence of independent Arab states is a relatively new phenomenon and as the Arab world remained under Western control or influence until the late 1940s or early 1950s, the Soviets were slow to discover the Arab 'revolutionary potential'; instead the USSR focused on its direct neighbours where its security was more immediately involved and with which its relations had been long and intensive.

Being less concerned with a direct aggression on the part of its weaker neighbours than with the possible transformation of their territories into a *place d'armes* against the Soviet Union, the newly established communist regime sought to incorporate these countries into a buffer zone that would separate between the USSR and British power in the Middle East. In the Soviet view, the effective functioning of this buffer zone hinged upon the existence of independent and stable states along their southern borders, both of which could circumvent the projection of nationalistic and religious incitement into the USSR and resist external domination. Hence, whereas British policy in the Middle East during the early 1920s still lay under the imputation of favouring weak rulers depending on British support, the Soviets focused upon the encouragement of strong national leaders such as Mustafa Kemal in Turkey and Reza Shah in Iran, and proved ready to settle for 'good neighbourly relations' with their southern neighbours, often based on a bilateral treaty which established a pattern of non-interference in internal affairs and neutrality in case of war (e.g. the Soviet-Iranian treaty of 1921).³ Moreover, before the Second World War the USSR was even willing, at times,

to tolerate multilateral agreements concluded by the local governments provided that they were not directed against the Soviet Union (e.g., the Saadabad Pact of 1937 between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan).

It was only after the Second World War that the Soviets replaced this defensive and aloof posture by a dynamic, indeed aggressive policy. Eager to exploit both the USSR's rise to a superpower status and the immense anti-colonialist wave that swept the Middle East in the immediate postwar era, Joseph Stalin attempted to tighten Moscow's grip over its southern neighbours through sheer physical expansion. Hence his pressures on Turkey for territorial and political concessions which included the return of Kars and Ardahan districts (ceded to Turkey in 1921) to the USSR, the establishment of Soviet bases on the Straits and the revision of the Montreux Convention which regulated the navigation regime there; hence his reluctance to evacuate the Soviet troops from northern Iran in violation of the 1943 Tehran Declaration.

It was not long, however, before this strategy backlashed, driving Turkey and Iran further to the arms of the West and convincing President Harry Truman that 'what Stalin wanted was control of the Black Sea straits and the Danube [and that] the Russians were planning world conquest'.⁴ The natural outcome was the 'Truman Doctrine' of March 1947 which sought to protect Turkey and Greece from the threat of 'international communism'. Five years later Turkey became a formal member in NATO and by 1955 the West had succeeded in establishing a cordon sanitaire around the USSR's southern border with the formation of the Baghdad Pact.

These developments, and the formation of the Baghdad Pact in particular, constituted a major setback for Soviet interests in the Middle East. Not only did the Pact transform what had been an effective buffer zone in the prewar period into an important link in the worldwide chain of Western containment strategy, but it also meant the extension of NATO's military power to the USSR's backyard, thus turning it into a potential theatre of war.⁵

'The Soviet Union cannot remain indifferent to the situation arising in the Near and Middle East', read the foreign policy statement issued in April 1955 in response to the formation of the Baghdad Pact, 'since . . . the USSR is situated very close to these countries'. Consequently, the 'establishment of foreign military bases on the territory of the countries of the Near and Middle East has a direct bearing on the security of the USSR'.⁶

In these circumstances, Moscow soon began to look for ways and means to stem the West's mounting military power in the Middle East. Unwilling to risk a frontal assault on the USSR's southern neighbours *à la* Stalin, the Soviet leadership sought to contain the Baghdad Pact by adopting an indirect approach: by keeping Afghanistan out of the Pact and trying to pool together those Arab countries opposed to the alliance. These attempts struck a responsive chord in Cairo and Damascus. Considering Iraq as the major obstacle to his aspirations to forge a united Arab bloc under Egyptian leadership, President Gamal Abd al-Nasser sought to dissuade other Arab countries from adhering to the Baghdad Pact; and, having failed to obtain Western military and economic backing for his goals, Nasser opted for a closer relationship with the USSR.

Syria, by contrast, was driven in the direction of the USSR by mainly defensive considerations. Notorious for domestic instability and surrounded by hostile countries, Syria's sense of insecurity rose sharply in 1955 following Israel's retaliatory raids on the Arab countries, on the one hand, and Iraqi and Turkish overt threats, accompanied by military shows of force aimed at deflecting Syrian opposition to the Baghdad Pact, on the other. In March 1955 the Soviet Union responded to reported Turkish and Iraqi troop concentrations on the Syrian border by announcing a readiness to extend to Syria 'aid in any form whatsoever for the purpose of safeguarding Syria's independence and sovereignty'.⁷ This display of support led shortly to the signing of the first Soviet-Syrian arms deal in the autumn of 1955, and within less than two years Syria was estimated to have purchased more than £100 million worth of Eastern bloc weapons.⁸

Even though the initial motivation behind the resurgence of Soviet interest in the Arab world in the mid-1950s was directly related to Moscow's anxiety to undermine the Baghdad Pact, these relations soon developed their own distinct momentum. During the summer and autumn of 1957, the Soviet Union again shielded Damascus from Turkish military pressures, going so far as to threaten that any aggression against Syria 'would not remain limited to this area alone' as well as dispatching a small naval unit on an official visit to Syria – a show of force hitherto unprecedented in a Middle Eastern, perhaps even Third World, crisis. Finally, the Soviets underscored their support for Syria by signing, on 29 October 1957, a large-scale economic and technical agreement at a total cost of \$579 million.⁹

Soviet-Syrian relations entered a chequered period in February

1958 following the formation of the Egyptian–Syrian merger. Despite their dissatisfaction with the newly-established union, which implied the incorporation of the Syrian polity into the Egyptian political structure, the Soviets saw no alternative but to accept this development ‘with seeming good grace’, and to acquiesce, ‘but not without bitter recrimination, in the prompt extension of Nasser’s anti-communism to Syria’.¹⁰ Damascus’s secession from the United Arab Republic in the autumn of 1961 did not bring the anticipated respite to Soviet–Syrian relations; the heavy-handed policy against the communists remained intact and the leader of the Communist Party, Khaled Bakdash, was not allowed to return from exile into which he had been forced during the merger period. However, as the secession enabled Moscow to renew its direct interaction with Damascus without Cairo’s interference, the Soviets quickly thawed the bilateral relationship by resuming arms supplies and launching aid programmes in the agricultural field.¹¹

Nor was the rise to power of the Ba’th Party in March 1963 viewed by the Soviets as a panacea. Moscow’s attitude to the Ba’th had fluctuated in the past in accordance with the political vicissitudes in Syria: from warm praise for its ‘progressive, anti-imperialist course’ in the mid-1950s to vehement deploration of this party as an ‘enemy of any social progress and reform in the Middle East’, following its anti-communist policy during the merger years.¹² Accordingly, the Soviets adopted a two-pronged approach towards the new regime which combined attempts to consolidate and expand the bilateral relationship through military and economic aid with occasional harsh criticism of the inconsistencies and contradictions in Ba’th policy:

The Ba’thists are out to supplant all other political forces of the Arab world. They have been trying to persuade the people that *al-Ba’th* can speedily and democratically secure Arab unity, also that it can ‘build socialism without the communists’. To the bourgeoisie they promise security of private property, while the oil monopolies are told that their privileges will remain inviolate.¹³

This sceptical view was replaced by a far more benign perception following the advent to power of the left-wing faction of the Ba’th Party in February 1966. Overwhelming the old leadership of the Ba’th in a bloody coup, the left-wing regime moved swiftly in the direction of the Soviet Union, raising the bilateral relationship to a higher qualitative level. Yet before long Moscow realized yet again

that this new and promising opening was no more resilient to domestic upheavals than its numerous predecessors; instead of stabilizing Syria's turbulent political system, the left-wing regime soon succumbed to the all too familiar internal strife, which, in November 1970, culminated in the seizure of power by the young and ambitious minister of defence, Hafiz Asad.

Given Asad's long record of outspoken criticism of Syria's growing dependence on the USSR, his advent to power certainly did not augur well for Soviet-Syrian relations; indeed, this development gave rise to a wave of hopes and speculations in the West on a dramatic shift in Syria's domestic (i.e. socio-economic) and international orientations.

However, these expectations have been belied by the course of events. Not only has Damascus not broken with Moscow, but Soviet relations with the Asad regime have developed into the most enduring and uninterrupted tie that the USSR has maintained with any Middle Eastern leader in the postwar era. Moreover, under Hafiz Asad, Syria has become the USSR's major Middle Eastern ally: a co-signatory to a bilateral Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, a recipient of vast military and economic support and a supplier of political, military and strategic services. It is Soviet aid and support which, to a considerable extent, has enabled Asad to transform Syria from a weak country – the object of inter-Arab competition whose name was synonymous with internal instability – into a regional political and military power whose wishes and interests cannot be ignored.

How can this development of Soviet-Syrian relations during the past two decades be explained? What goals and motivations have underlaid Soviet policy towards Syria? What means and techniques have been used in pursuit of these goals and how effective have they been?

By way of addressing these questions this book is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the structure of the Soviet-Syrian relationship and analyzes the nature and characteristics of its main three components: the political, the military and the economic. The political realm has been the most elusive and fluctuating dimension of the Soviet-Syrian relationship, witnessing abrupt shifts from close cooperation, convergence and amity to confrontation, alienation and blatant hostility. The vicissitudes in the political sphere have been partially balanced by economic factors which, though playing a subordinate role, have injected a measure of stability into Soviet-

Syrian relations. With the exception of several years during which Syria enjoyed the economic prosperity of rising oil prices and generous Arab support, the economic gains reaped by the Soviet Union from its various forms of aid to Syria have been limited. Rather, economic aid has served as a means to demonstrate Soviet goodwill towards Syria so as to promote the USSR's political goals there.

It is the military sphere, however, which has borne the main burden of Soviet-Syrian relations. It is here that the Soviets have made their heaviest investments and have reaped the most tangible gains, such as port facilities in Syrian ports and hard currency earnings. It is through reliance on this instrument that the USSR has sought to enhance, albeit to varying degrees of success, its political standing *vis-à-vis* Syria, as well as other regional and external actors.

Two main conclusions derive from the discussion in this part. First and contrary to the prevalent view, the Soviet-Syrian political relationship falls neither into the category of 'patron-client relations' nor into 'the tail wags the dog' paradigm. 'If anything, these relations should be portrayed in terms of a mutually beneficial strategic interdependence between two allies; a relationship favouring each partner in accordance with the vicissitudes in regional and global affairs'.¹⁴ Occasional disagreements, frictions and manipulations apart, neither party has compromised core interests for the sake of the friendship. Furthermore, with the passage of time the two allies have developed finely tuned 'synchronization mechanisms' for each other's sensitivities and goals which enable them both to recognize the limits of influence and to exploit the fields of effective cooperation.

Secondly, notwithstanding the prominence of military support in the evolution of Soviet-Syrian relations, Moscow has taken a rather sceptical view of the utility of this foreign policy instrument. This scepticism has been reflected in the USSR's reluctance to expand its independent military presence in Syria beyond the barest minimum, in its cautious and circumspect (yet significant) wartime military support to Syria, and in the tireless Soviet effort to moderate Damascus's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Having established the main parameters of the Soviet-Syrian relationship, Part II sets out to trace the evolution of Soviet policy towards Syria during the past two decades and seeks to discern the elements of continuity and change in this policy from Brezhnev to Gorbachev. Its major conclusion is that 'in spite of the fundamental difference between the world view and tactics of Gorbachev and those of his predecessors, the overriding concern of Soviet Middle

Eastern policy from Brezhnev to Gorbachev (with the qualified exception of Andropov's brief period in power) has remained essentially unchanged, namely, the attainment and preservation of stability'.¹⁵

More concretely, Soviet–Syrian relations from 1970 onwards have undergone two distinct stages divided by Anwar Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 and the ensuing Egyptian–Israeli peace process. Until then, the balance sheet of Soviet–Syrian relations clearly tilted in Syria's favour due to the structural constraints imposed by the contemporary international system on the manoeuvrability of both superpowers: a strategically important area for the two great-power blocs, given both its proximity to the USSR's southern borders and its huge oil deposits, this region has been an attractive target for imperialism. While this factor jeopardized the independent development of local actors before the Second World War, great-power rivalry in the Middle East in the post-war era with both blocs seeking to enlist as many local allies as possible, has significantly improved the bargaining position of the regional states. Thus, by remaining Moscow's only ally in the Arab–Israeli sphere following the Egyptian drift from the Soviet orbit and by being the sole channel through which the USSR has been able to resist the monopolization of the political process by the United States, Syria enjoys real leverage over its more powerful ally.

Fortunately for Moscow, this imbalance has gradually disappeared in the period since 1977 following both the evolution of a separate Egyptian–Israeli peace process and the mounting domestic opposition to the Asad regime. Strengthened in his view that Egypt's desertion of the Arab camp left Syria as the sole active champion of the Arab cause, Asad embarked on an ambitious effort to achieve the 'strategic parity' with Israel that would enable Syria, on its own, to 'regain the usurped Arab rights'. Since the attainment of this objective, as well as the stemming of the domestic turbulence in Syria, have required substantial Soviet aid and support, Moscow's leverage over Damascus has increased significantly. This change in fortunes has, in turn, enabled the USSR to broaden its power base in the Arab world beyond the traditional 'radical' camp and, moreover, to intensify its pressures on Damascus in order to bring it into line with the Soviet wishes, a policy that gained particular momentum under Chernenko and, much more so, during the Gorbachev era.

Part I
The Structure of
Soviet–Syrian Relations

1 Moscow and Damascus: a Patron–Client Relationship?

Analyses of international politics, especially great-power/small-state relationships, often fall within one of the following two broad categories: ‘the patron–client relationship’ and the ‘tail wags the dog’ (or, ‘the power of the weak’). The first mode of analysis argues that relationships between actors of unequal power and status favour, by and large, the patron, whose bargaining position is by definition better than that of the client. Such relations may range from a more or less symbiotic interaction to a situation of unilateral exploitation, and are based on reciprocity in the exchange of material goods or protection for services, loyalty and deference to the patron.¹

Conversely, the tail wags the dog paradigm starts from the assumption that the structural traits of the contemporary international system, particularly the inter-bloc polarization and the consequent superpower competition for allies, together with the advent of nuclear weaponry on the international scene, have significantly enhanced the bargaining power of the small actors *vis-à-vis* the great powers. As a leading student of international politics stated: ‘When the eagle’s claws are clipped the dove can save its life’.²

These two diametrically opposed paradigms have been applied to the analysis of Soviet–Arab relations in general and the Soviet–Syrian relationship in particular. ‘The terms of the Soviet–Syrian relationship are typical of . . . patron–client relationships’ is one view: ‘The Soviets provide Syria with assistance necessary for it to be effective in regional policy, and in exchange the Soviets obtain a presence in Syria as well as Syrian support for Soviet actions in areas outside Syria’s core interest’.³ And the distance from this view to the belief that Syria is merely a Soviet proxy, ‘the Cuba of the Middle East’, is short:

Syrian leaders consistently and closely identify with Soviet goals . . . [Syria] has concurred with the USSR on every significant issue in the General Assembly in recent years . . . the USSR derives many benefits from its close relations with Damascus. In

particular, Syria provides an eastern Mediterranean base, an air-defence link, and an agency for terrorism. . . . In return, Syria's cause receives support from the whole Soviet bloc.⁴

Such views contrast with analyses emphasizing the abundant leverage given to Middle Eastern countries in their relations with the Soviet Union: 'The Soviets, much like their American rivals, and perhaps even more so, do not control their Middle Eastern allies. They are constrained by their global interests to such an extent that they have little choice but to play to the tune of their far weaker allies'.⁵

This chapter seeks to determine whether and to what extent the Soviet–Syrian political relationship conforms to these two paradigms by focusing on the three most important political issues which have stood at the fore of the bilateral relationship: the Arab–Israeli conflict (i.e. the nature of a political settlement and the means for its attainment), the Syrian intervention in Lebanon and the formalization of Soviet–Syrian relations. It does so on the assumption that it is the more acute situations, those involving core interests (and in consequence, serious differences of opinion) which best illustrate the scope of a political relationship. For, 'like breathing, influence becomes especially noticeable when pressure is applied or concern heightens'.⁶

NO MILITARY SOLUTION? MOSCOW, DAMASCUS, AND THE OCTOBER WAR

There is little doubt that the Arab–Israeli conflict is the most important single issue underlying the Soviet–Syrian relationship. It is this prolonged and bitter feud between Arabs and Jews which has created the main avenue for the broadening and deepening of the Soviet–Syrian relationship as well as an unsettled bone of contention marring those very ties.

If, until the 1967 Six-Day War, the Arab–Israeli conflict constituted a useful tool for the eradication of Western presence and influence in the Middle East, from that time onwards the dispute has become the major lodestone of external intervention and as such, the most dangerous source of instability in the region. Because the USSR's fundamental interest in the Middle East has been the stabilization of the area (albeit according to its own image), a solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict has become a pressing necessity.

Theoretically, the Arabs had two alternatives to settle their prolonged dispute with Israel which, since 1967, has essentially revolved around the issue of the territories lost in the Six Day War: they could try to take these territories by force (the so-called 'military option') or to convince Israel by peaceful means to return them. The USSR, on account of its overriding interest in regional stability and reluctance to upset the edifice of global *détente*, has been adamantly opposed to a military solution of the conflict advocating instead a peaceful settlement that would be negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations, and in which the two superpowers would play a leading role.

This Soviet position was not shared by the Syrians who, entrenched in the conviction that 'the contest with Israel involved nothing less than the Arabs' national existence',⁷ viewed the armed struggle as the only means to deal with Israel. Asad's rise to power did not change this deep-seated attitude. On the contrary, as early as December 1970 he 'reaffirmed Syria's rejection of Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967 on the grounds that it meant the "liquidation of the Palestine question". War, not UN resolutions, was the only way to make Israel yield'.⁸ In Asad's own words, 'the decisive factor in the conflict will be the armed battle itself . . . the battle is the basic and most likely course to be taken for the liberation of our land'.⁹

The Soviets were dismayed by Asad's uncompromising stance, but not extremely concerned. Viewing the decision on war to lie essentially in Cairo, rather than in Damascus, they sought to prevent a regional conflagration by disrupting Egyptian war preparations through the withholding of arms supplies. After an initial success in forcing Sadat to postpone his deadlines for launching war, the Soviet strategy backfired; in July 1972 Soviet-Egyptian relations plunged to their lowest ebb following the expulsion of 15,000 Soviet military personnel from Egypt.

Sadat's move took the Soviets by surprise and drove them to revise their overall strategy towards the war preparations made by the Arabs. Instead of direct, somewhat blunt attempts to frustrate these efforts by manipulating arms supplies, the USSR sought to forestall a regional conflagration by persuading the Arabs on both the exorbitant costs of war, and the significant benefits of a negotiated settlement. In April 1973, for example, both Podgorny and Kosygin called upon 'all peaceful states' in the Middle East to cooperate in the establishment of a 'fair and lasting peace in the area on the basis of the November 1967 Security Council Resolution'.¹⁰ These persuasive

attempts were accompanied by numerous covert warnings delivered to the US administration with the hope of bringing it to pressure Israel to modify its stance.¹¹

Unlike the pre-July 1972 policy which had exclusively focused on Egypt, Moscow's persuasion campaign during 1973 was also directed towards Syria thus reflecting Soviet awareness of the growing inter-relatedness between policy decisions in Damascus and Cairo. Indeed, the Syrian–Egyptian collusion, which fundamentally tied Egypt's capacity for war to Syrian politics, turned out to be extremely beneficial from the Soviet viewpoint: in May 1973, in deference to Soviet requests made during his secret visit to Moscow, Asad managed to persuade Sadat to postpone their planned attack until after the superpower summit meeting at San Clemente in June 1973.¹²

However impressive, the Soviet success in forestalling the war in May 1973 proved to be very short-lived. Despite Brezhnev's dramatic efforts during the June summit, he failed to convince his American counterparts of the inflammability of the Middle East situation. In Kissinger's account, during the final night at San Clemente Brezhnev demanded an immediate meeting with Nixon who was already asleep. When this unusual meeting was arranged, the Soviet leader urged the Americans to reach an immediate understanding with the USSR on a Middle East settlement that would provide for an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders in return for an end to the state of belligerency. If the superpowers failed to reach such an understanding, he argued, 'we will have difficulty in keeping the military situation from flaring up'. These pleas were to no avail. Considering Brezhnev's warnings of the impending war to be no more than 'psychological warfare', Nixon and Kissinger agreed neither to cooperate with Moscow in arranging a peace settlement nor to apply pressure on Israel.¹³

The Syrians looked forward to the San Clemente meeting with hopes as well as apprehensions. On the eve of the summit, Asad sought to forestall any compromise of the Arab cause by reminding the two superpowers that the spirit of *détente* did not preclude the possibility of another Middle Eastern war¹⁴ and similar Syrian warnings continued throughout the summit. 'Although so far there has been no definite news from Washington that the Middle East will be discussed at the Brezhnev–Nixon summit', wrote *al-Ba'th* on 22 June, 'speculation indicates that during the meeting between the two leaders, the Soviet Union might have proposed the withdrawal of the Zionist authorities from Arab territories in accordance with a formula, on

the basis of which the foreign ministers of both countries would prepare working documents'. The striking similarity between this report and Brezhnev's actual appeal to Nixon 24 hours later leaves little doubt that Syria was, in effect, trying to remind the USSR of its pledge to advance the Arab cause. Indeed, *al-Ba'th* took much care to clarify the nature of Syria's expectations of the Soviet Union:

The Arab masses at this time . . . are not so much interested in the signing of an agreement or the issuing of a joint statement announcing the solution of the problem of Zionist occupation, as they are in the two sides devoting a certain amount of attention to and discussion of the problem of Zionist occupation.

Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that the outcome of the summit was received by Asad with deep disappointment. After all, it was he who, despite his public commitment to the military option, had acquiesced in the Soviet request to exhaust the political process. The USSR's failure to live up to Asad's expectations was therefore bound to incur a measure of Syrian criticism. 'The Soviet-American accord comes at the expense of the weak and vanquished peoples, above all our people' wrote *al-Ba'th* on 25 June, adding that, 'even if the whole world breathes the fragrance of accord, the fact that our people has the right to their land and dignity cannot be changed'. Asad's loss of faith in Moscow's ability to promote the Arab cause by peaceful means was further illustrated by his reported rejection of a Soviet request for restraint forwarded to him by a member of the Politburo, Andrei Kirilenko, during a visit to Damascus in July 1973.¹⁵

Aware of their diminishing leverage over Syria and reluctant to antagonize Asad further, the Soviets apparently ceased their covert political persuasion campaign – arms supplies to Syria had never been used as an instrument of influence. From July 1973 onwards, the USSR tried to prevent the outbreak of hostilities both by alarming public opinion to the acuteness of the Middle East situation¹⁶ and by passing a host of covert warnings to the US administration.¹⁷ As is well known, neither these warnings nor Moscow's last-minute desperate attempt to signal the imminence of war through the evacuation of its civilian dependents from Syria and Egypt on 4 October succeeded in holding back the Arab campaign.

The outbreak of the October War should be viewed, therefore, as a failure of Soviet political and diplomatic power. Not only did it

expose Moscow's lack of influence with respect to the United States and Israel (both of which chose to turn a deaf ear to the desperate Soviet warnings on the imminence of war), but it also illustrated the USSR's inability to dissuade Asad (and Sadat) from embarking on a foreign policy course which it considered harmful to its interests.

DEBATE OVER A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

However undesirable in itself, the October War paved the way for a potentially positive development from the Soviet point of view. It broke the existing political stalemate and set in motion a process of negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbours which had long been advocated by the USSR. Consequently, if until October 1973 Soviet–Arab differences concentrated on the USSR's attempts to forestall the military option, after that war the focus of debate has shifted to the nature of the desirable settlement and the political mechanism for its pursuit.

From the moment it was passed on 22 November 1967, Security Council Resolution 242¹⁸ has been viewed by the Soviets as 'the only way to peace in the Middle East'.¹⁹ Moscow's adoption of Resolution 242 as the basis for an Arab–Israeli settlement, in spite of the resolution's ambiguity on the issue of an Israeli withdrawal, probably reflected its reluctance to side with the maximalist Arab demands. Indeed, in the course of the preparatory discussions with the United States on the resolution, the USSR was ready to drop its condemnation of Israel and the demand for compensation for the refugees contained in earlier drafts; it also stated its willingness to participate in a superpower arms embargo on the region following the conclusion of a peace agreement.²⁰ Moreover, in a meeting in New York in 1968 with the Israeli ambassador to the UN, Yosef Tekoah, the Soviet deputy foreign minister, Vladimir Semyonov, implied his government's readiness to support minor border adjustments between Israel and its Arab neighbours.²¹

For more than a year, then, the USSR remained wavering between the two possible interpretations of Resolution 242, demanding at times the complete withdrawal of Israel while on other occasions referring only to withdrawal from 'occupied territories'. This ambiguity was dispelled in December 1968 by the presentation of the first Soviet comprehensive peace plan, which envisaged an Israeli return

to the 5 June 1967 lines. Thereafter, the USSR has been very clear that, in its view, Resolution 242 implied a complete Israeli withdrawal. Moreover, from the October War onwards, the Soviet interpretation of this resolution has come to contain the following three 'organically interconnected elements':

- (i) The withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Arab territories occupied in 1967.
- (ii) The exercise of inalienable rights by the Arab people of Palestine including its right to self-determination and establishment of its own state.
- (iii) International guarantees for the security and inviolability of the frontiers of all Middle Eastern states – the Arab states neighbouring with Israel, on the one hand, and the state of Israel, on the other – and their right to independent existence and development.²²

The Soviet vision of a Middle East settlement has not been more acceptable to Asad than it was to his predecessors. To be sure, Asad's address to the nation following the October War, in effect, recognized Security Council Resolution 242.²³ However, both Damascus's interpretation of the resolution and successive Syrian references to the essence of a political settlement throughout the 1970s and the 1980s have reflected a persistent and adamant rejection of Israel's legitimacy.²⁴

In the Syrian view, since Israel is 'an imperialist-linked colonial-settler state implanted in the heart of historic Syria at the expense of Syria's southern Palestinian cousins . . . the Arab-Israeli conflict did not start in 1967. It started in 1917, with the Balfour declaration, when international Zionism, in league with international imperialism, started moving into Palestine and displacing its people to establish the Israeli state'.²⁵ Hence, and since the 1967 war is merely 'a consequence of the Zionist presence in Palestine', the recovery of the territories lost in that war would not resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict because 'before 1967 no Egyptian and Syrian territory was occupied but the dispute was there'.²⁶

The Arab-Israeli conflict is therefore much more than a question of territories occupied in one war or another; it is a mortal struggle over 'existence' and 'destiny', a zero-sum game that must eventually be settled in favour of one of the two sides: 'Either we Arabs exist in this part of this world . . . or the Zionist enemy exists at the expense

of Arab territories, Arab nations, and Arab rights'.²⁷ This is because the Zionists aspire to no less than the complete domination of the Middle East. As Asad put it:

The ambitions of racist Zionism are as clear as the sun. . . . They do not want Palestine alone or a piece of land here or there. They do not want only another Arab country. They want the land from the Nile to the Euphrates. . . . They want the Israeli state from the Nile to the Euphrates to impose their hegemony beyond that until it covers the entire world.²⁸

In these circumstances, Syria has no other alternative but to

work to prevent the Palestinian issue from being transformed into *mere elimination of the traces of the 1967 aggression*. This must be done by rejecting peace and recognition of the Zionist entity and by not relinquishing the Arab lands under any circumstances. . . . [There is also] a need to work to promote the Palestinian personality and to *support the right of the Palestinian people to establish a national independent authority on liberated Palestinian land, and to continue the struggle to liberate all Palestinian soil*.²⁹

As for the interrelationship between the prospective Palestinian state and Syria, Asad has made it clear that 'Palestine is not only a part of the Arab homeland but a basic part of southern Syria. We also believe that it is our right and duty, and we cannot concede right or abandon our duty, to be determined that Palestine should remain a liberated part of our Arab homeland and of our Syrian Arab region'.³⁰

Given Asad's 'iron grasp of the possible',³¹ it is doubtful whether he entertains any illusions regarding Syria's (or for that matter, Arab) ability to subvert the State of Israel within the immediate future. However, since Asad views the conflict as involving no less than the Arab national existence, he believes that the Arabs should adopt a long-range historical perspective; they should exert the utmost effort to redress the strategic imbalance with Israel, while bearing in mind that this process may be a very protracted one. In his own words:

I regret to say that some of us, as Arab citizens, are seeking the shortest, easiest and least difficult roads, which at the same time

are the most prone to failure . . . we view the matter from the perspective of the future of the nation and not that of the next few hours, months or years in which we shall live. . . . If we, as a generation, fail to do and to achieve what must be done, there will be future generations which will deal with this issue in the proper manner. . . . What I am saying here is not new. I am just reviewing some facts in our history. Let us go back to the Crusaders' invasion. Although they fought us for 200 years, we did not surrender or capitulate. They, too, were a big power and had scored victories, while we had been defeated. After 200 years, however, we triumphed. Why are we now expected either to score a decisive victory in approximately 30 years or completely surrender?³²

In short, the ultimate Arab triumph over Israel is a forgone conclusion however long it may take:

The facts of history, the given facts of reality, and the elementary truth of right and logic confirm that . . . the Zionist invasion is bound to be defeated and its imperialist colonization plan shall fail. Palestine is bound to be returned to its people as a purely Arab state.³³

The Soviets signalled their dissatisfaction with the Syrian rejectionism by persistently reiterating their support for the right of all Middle Eastern states for secured existence – at times, in embarrassing circumstances for Damascus. Yet, aware of the deep, if not unbridgeable gap between the Soviet and Syrian positions on the essence of a political settlement, Moscow did not attempt to force Damascus to modify its fundamental stance; instead it preferred to concentrate on the more immediate and less precarious objective of securing a mutual agreement regarding the ways and means for resolving the conflict. This task, nevertheless, turned out to be no easier than the attempts to prevent the outbreak of the October War. Despite Asad's pronounced readiness to embark on the 'political stage in Syria's struggle',³⁴ in December 1973 Syria decided to stay out of the Geneva conference.

The USSR refrained from applying covert political pressures on Syria in order to bring it to Geneva. It was only in January 1974, as the scheduled reconvening of the Geneva conference was approaching, that the Soviets initiated intensive consultations with Syria in an attempt to harness it to the negotiations process. These consulta-

tions, which reportedly included the exchange of several messages between Brezhnev and Asad, and more importantly, a secret visit by Asad to Moscow during the first week of January,³⁵ continued into February. Unlike their conduct before the October War, which had completely avoided military sanctions against Syria, this time the Soviets apparently augmented their political pressures by both a limited slowdown of arms shipments, and the demand for a Syrian repayment in hard currency for its arms procurement.³⁶ Soviet pressure on Syria, especially the arms supply cutback, indicated the intensity of Moscow's interest in the reconvening of Geneva. The possibility of yet another stalemate in the area, and of Syria following the Egyptian example and joining the American-sponsored negotiations process outside the Geneva framework, seemed alarming enough to make the USSR risk a crisis with Syria – at the time when its relations with Egypt were further deteriorating. It was not long, however, before the Soviet policy backlashed: in February 1974, ignoring the Geneva forum completely, Asad headed towards a disengagement agreement with Israel under American auspices and, moreover, launched a war of attrition against Israel on the Golan Heights.³⁷

At this juncture, the Soviets decided to leave the stick in favour of the carrot. They blamed 'Israel's intransigence' for the conflagration on the Golan and supported Syria's right to use 'all effective means for liberation of its occupied lands'; they also lifted the limited arms embargo and, more importantly, concluded a new large scale arms deal with the Syrians in April 1974. This change of tack was ostensibly successful, since Syria chose not to emulate the Egyptian example and proved willing to give the Soviets an appearance of participation in the disengagement talks. Furthermore, in the summer of 1974 Asad dropped his unequivocal rejection of Geneva and adopted, in fact, the Soviet position which advocated a quest for a comprehensive settlement through the Geneva conference.

Conclusively, the pattern of Soviet–Syrian relations both during and after the disengagement talks illustrated yet again the limits of Soviet influence. Just as Asad had been resilient to Soviet pressures before the October War, so he remained immune to Moscow's efforts to tempt Syria away from cooperation with the United States over a disengagement agreement. It was not the Soviet anxiety over the extent of US–Syrian coordination which drove Asad to abandon the step-by-step process and to close ranks with Moscow; rather it was his growing disillusionment with the US ability to further the Syrian

cause and his consequent conclusion that as far as Syria was concerned, the United States had served its purpose.

Moreover, Asad skilfully exploited Syria's rise to prominence to extract the maximum benefits from the USSR. By giving Moscow an image of partnership in the negotiations process, albeit devoid of any concrete substance, he not only succeeded in defusing Soviet wariness, but also managed to rally Moscow behind the disengagement agreement. Nor did Asad fail to reap abundant political, military and economic gains in return for his collaboration with the USSR in the (abortive) campaign to obstruct the second Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement.

This 'delicate balance of tolerance' of Syrian support for Moscow's position regarding the way towards a political settlement (i.e. an international conference), and a reluctant Soviet acquiescence to Damascus's persistent rejection of Israel's legitimacy, was to continue – vicissitudinally – into the late 1980s. Thus, the Soviets made it abundantly clear to Damascus that their support for Syria's military expansion in the wake of both the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty and the 1982 War should not be construed for an acceptance of the Syrian interpretation of the concept of 'strategic parity'. The Syrians, for their part, though remaining entrenched in their uncompromising world view of the Arab-Israeli conflict, reciprocated the generous Soviet aid by coming forward in strong support of an international conference on the Middle East.

Even Mikhail Gorbachev, during his first years in office, preferred to focus on the issue of means, namely, ensuring Damascus's continued support for the convocation of an international conference and unrooting the military option from the Syrian *modus operandi*. This he did in a far more direct and outspoken fashion than his predecessors. If during the Chernenko interregnum the Soviets implied their reluctance to back Syria's quest for 'strategic parity' by using the indirect formula that 'the Arabs possess all necessary means for foiling the schemes of US imperialism and its Israeli partners', Gorbachev has not been deterred from an outward denunciation of this objective as 'diverting attention from the question of achieving security and peace in the Middle East'.

From 1988 onwards, however, the Soviets have embarked on a concerted effort to force Syria out of its rejectionism, employing to this end a variety of means, ranging from continued manipulations of arms supplies to attempts to isolate Syria in the Arab world through support for the moderate Arab parties to direct political pressures.³⁸

It is too premature to assess the full impact of Gorbachev's pressures on Syria. On the one hand, Damascus has remained defiant to Moscow's main wish: not only has it failed to follow the PLO's trail and accept a 'two-states solution' but it has harshly criticized this move and has refrained from recognizing the self-declared Palestinian state. On the other hand, in order to avoid rocking the Soviet-Syrian relationship Damascus has made several declaratory gestures towards Moscow, most notably its renunciation of the military option and its support for the Soviet peace plan.³⁹ Above all, the persistent Soviet pressures have decisively exacerbated Asad's sense of vulnerability thereby playing an important role in driving Syria towards a series of moderate moves, namely, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Egypt and the reported signalling to Israel (via the American channel) of its readiness to enter into negotiations on mutual reductions in their chemical arsenals, and even on a possible agreement over the future of the Golan Heights.⁴⁰

CRISIS OVER LEBANON

While the issue of an Arab-Israeli political settlement has constituted a protracted unsettled bone of contention between Moscow and Damascus with occasional outbursts of sharp differences, since the mid-1970s, and particularly since the establishment of a permanent Syrian presence in Lebanon in June 1976, the evolution of Soviet-Syrian relations has become increasingly dependent on the vicissitudes of the Lebanese civil war. Thus, as Lebanon formed the stage for a series of Syrian-Israeli crises, leading ultimately to war, as well as for the power struggle between Damascus and the PLO, it constituted the backdrop against which Soviet-Syrian relations played out some of their most trying moments. In the event, it was Syria's intervention in Lebanon during the latter part of 1976 which produced the most acute Soviet-Syrian confrontation in the pre-Gorbachev era.

When Asad sent his troops into Lebanon on 1 June 1976, he had little reason to anticipate any rift in Syrian-Soviet relations. Not only was Syria at that time the USSR's major Middle Eastern ally, but the Syrian pacification efforts in Lebanon since mid-1975, including the incremental military presence there, had met with Soviet approval. Indeed, as will be shown in Chapter 6, Moscow's initial reaction to

the Syrian intervention was essentially positive, and it was only on 9 June, more than a week after the beginning of the Syrian action that the Soviet position changed from vocal support to overt criticism.

On 14 June, while avoiding a direct demand for a Syrian withdrawal, *TASS* cited the Syrian minister of information, Ahmad Iskandar Ahmad, as saying that the Syrian troops had entered Lebanon in order to create conditions 'for a dialogue among the Lebanese', and once this aim had been attained the soldiers would leave immediately. The message of this reference was clear and unmistakable: since Syria had failed to produce the intended dialogue, there was no longer any justification for its military presence on Lebanese soil. Indeed, a month later, on 17 July, the Soviet News Agency went a step further by arguing openly that a reconciliation between the Syrians and the PLO 'will become possible only after Syria pulls out all its forces from Lebanon'.

By late August, overt demands for a Syrian withdrawal had become common in the Soviet media. 'No matter what considerations guided Damascus when it sent its troops into Lebanon', wrote *Pravda* on 7 September,

this decision proved to be harmful to the Palestinian movement and enabled the right-wing forces to deal telling blows at the units of Palestinian and Lebanese national patriotic forces. It is clear why the Lebanese progressive organizations and the PLO, many Arab countries and other countries demand withdrawal of the Syrian units from Lebanon.

The extent of Soviet anxiety over Damascus's Lebanese policy was perhaps best illustrated by the hardening tone of the Soviet media, which put Syrian behaviour towards the leftist-Palestinian alliance on a par with that of the Israelis. 'The Lebanese patriots and the Palestinians have just found themselves in a double encirclement', argued *Radio Moscow* on 28 August, for while 'the Israeli ships blockade the southern coast of Lebanon to prevent the delivery of ammunition and food to the Lebanese national-patriotic forces and the Palestinian resistance units, retaliatory actions against the attacks of the Lebanese reactionaries are hampered by the Syrian control of strategic passes in the east, south and north of the country'.

These public displays of dissatisfaction with the Syrian action in Lebanon were coupled with more tangible covert measures. According to Israeli sources, as early as mid-June 1976 the Soviets declined a

Syrian request for financial aid to offset the cost of their involvement in Lebanon.⁴¹ During July, several missions were exchanged between Damascus and Moscow – without any visible results. Following some impressive Christian successes gained through reliance on Syrian support, Foreign Minister Abd al-Khalim Khaddam was summoned to Moscow in early July for discussions on the Lebanese situation. The widening gap between the two sides was demonstrated both by the lack of any joint statement to summarize the talks and by the criticism of Syria in the Soviet media throughout the visit. A return visit to Damascus later in the month by the Soviet deputy foreign minister, Vasily Kuznetsov, proved equally unsuccessful.⁴²

Soviet attempts at influence reached their climax on 11 July when Brezhnev sent a personal letter to Asad in which he harshly criticized Syria's Lebanese policy, called for an immediate truce and implied Soviet sanctions would follow if Damascus did not withdraw its forces from Lebanon. 'We follow with concern Syria's position and orientations' he wrote. 'We understand neither your line of conduct nor the aims which you are pursuing in Lebanon . . . if Syria persists in the course which it has taken, it will give the imperialists and their collaborators the opportunity to gain control of the Arab nations and progressive movements'. Therefore, he continued, 'we exhort the Syrian leaders to take all possible measures to end the military operations conducted against the resistance and the Lebanese national movement. . . . You can contribute to this by *withdrawing your forces from Lebanon*. You have a good opportunity; the temporary presence of Arab forces in Lebanon'. 'It goes without saying', he concluded, 'that we are *still* prepared to consolidate the links of friendship between our two countries . . . unless Syria behaves in such a way as to cause rifts in the relations between us'.⁴³ The seriousness of Brezhnev's threat became evident within a few days. Mid-July onwards witnessed a significant slowdown in Soviet arms supplies to Syria as well as some delays in the programme of technical assistance.⁴⁴

This reprimand, unparalleled in scope and intensity until then, won Moscow precious little. Offended by what he perceived to be unjust criticism, Asad completely ignored the Soviet demand for withdrawal and intensified his drive towards a *pax Syriana* in Lebanon. On 10 June the Syrian Progressive National Front responded to the TASS statement of the day before by issuing a pledge to continue Syria's policy in Lebanon.⁴⁵ Ten days later, during Asad's first visit to France – in itself a clear signal of Syria's determination to keep its

options open – the Syrian president had nothing but praise for the French mediation attempts in Lebanon. More annoying from the Soviet point of view, Asad managed to gain French tacit support for the ‘Syrian efforts to help the warring parties in Lebanon to achieve a political solution to the Lebanese crisis that would preserve the unity and independence of Lebanon’. These efforts, Asad promised, would continue until Lebanon was ‘rescued from its painful ordeal’.⁴⁶

Given Moscow’s deep concern over both Western interference in the Lebanese crisis and the continuation of the Syrian action, Asad’s words constituted open defiance. Not only did he legitimize Western intervention in Lebanon, but he also aligned himself with a Western power on a policy totally rejected by the USSR.

Nevertheless, in his anxiety to avoid an open rift with Moscow, Asad refrained from overt criticism of the Soviet position and even made occasional gestures to Moscow. Thus, for example, the joint statement issued on 1 July at the close of a visit to Damascus by a Soviet Peace Committee delegation contained Syrian support for the reconvening of the Geneva conference.⁴⁷ In mid-August the Syrian media carried a harsh attack on America’s Middle Eastern policy, accusing the United States of seeking to exploit the Lebanese events ‘as a means to pressure the Arabs to accept capitulationist solutions’.⁴⁸ Two months later, in a policy statement published on 12 October, the Syrian government openly pronounced its interest in ‘strengthening relations of cooperation with the friendly socialist states’.⁴⁹

This combination of relentlessness and leniency, of determination and pragmatism had a moderating impact on Soviet behaviour. The Syrian resilience clarified to Moscow the distance it would have to go in order to twist Damascus’s arm; Syria’s avoidance of any brinkmanship in its relations with the USSR, however, demonstrated to Moscow the benefits of maintaining its special relationship with Damascus. This relationship seemed all the more important in the autumn of 1976 in the light of the Soviet intention to launch a fresh peace initiative for the Arab–Israeli conflict which would need at least tacit Syrian approval.⁵⁰ Above all, the heavy blows dealt at the leftist-Palestinian camp from July to the end of September appear to have driven the Soviets back to the conclusion that a *pax Syriana* might, after all, be the least of all evils.

Thus, the early autumn of 1976 witnessed the continuation of Soviet public demands for a Syrian pull-back and, more important, the reiteration of this demand in yet another personal message from

Brezhnev to Asad on 11 September.⁵¹ Yet Soviet policy during that month showed a shift from exclusive pressures on Syria towards a more balanced position, aimed at mediating an arrangement between the warring factions in Lebanon.⁵² In accordance with this line in mid-September Farouq Kadoumi, head of the PLO's political department, was invited to Moscow where he was apparently pressured by his Soviet hosts to moderate the PLO's position on a settlement with Syria.⁵³ The Soviet pressures on the PLO, reinforced by several meetings between Arafat and Vladimir Silkine, the Soviet *chargé d'affaires* in Beirut, seemed to bear fruit; on 24 September, the day after the Syrian-sponsored president, Elias Sarkis, had entered office, Arafat sent a letter to the Lebanese president, informing him of the PLO's decision to adopt a unilateral ceasefire as well as to conform to the agreements regulating Palestinian–Lebanese relations.

This development turned out to be very short-lived. On 28 September, the Syrian army, together with the Christians, launched a big offensive in the Lebanese mountains and managed to drive the leftist-Palestinian forces away from their strongholds controlling the Damascus–Beirut highway. The Syrian offensive, which took the Soviets by surprise, came at a very inopportune moment for Moscow. In the first place, the fresh deterioration in Lebanon diverted public attention from the Soviet peace initiative of 1 October thereby contributing to its obstruction. Second, the offensive dealt a heavy blow to the evolving reconciliation between Syria and the leftist-Palestinian camp, subjected the Soviets to severe criticism by the PLO, and increased external interference, particularly Egyptian and Saudi, in the conflict.

Moscow's frustration over the Syrian move was quick in expressing itself. On 30 September, the same day that Syria stopped its offensive and called upon the Palestinians to enter into negotiations on a political settlement, the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee issued a strongly worded statement on the Lebanese situation. The statement praised the PLO's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire as reflecting a 'high sense of responsibility', blamed Damascus, along with the right-wing forces, for the escalation in Lebanon, and accused Syria of undermining the Arab struggle against Zionism and imperialism:

The fact that the Syrian troops which have been on Lebanese territory since last June are taking part in the present military operations against the Palestinian Resistance and the national

patriotic forces of Lebanon is causing special concern to world public opinion, a concern which is shared by the Soviet people. It is absolutely clear that what is taking place in Lebanon today is harming not only the Lebanese people, but the entire struggle of the Arab peoples and states against Israeli aggression and for a just political settlement in the Middle East.⁵⁴

The Soviet criticism was repeated on several occasions in early October,⁵⁵ with no apparent impact on Asad. On the contrary, on 11 October he decided to launch yet another large military offensive which, within less than 48 hours, crushed the leftist-Palestinian defences, leaving the Syrian forces at the outskirts of Beirut and Sidon.

Though this offensive was primarily motivated by the desire to improve Syria's bargaining position in the all-Arab summit conference scheduled to open in Cairo on 18 October, it was viewed by Moscow as a rebuff to the Soviet position.⁵⁶ No less worrisome from the Soviet standpoint was Asad's acceptance of a Saudi invitation to attend the mini-summit in Riyadh on 16–18 October, with the leaders of Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon and the PLO. True, the conference saved the leftist-Palestinian alliance from total defeat, since Asad, as a show of goodwill, ordered a general ceasefire until the completion of the discussions in Riyadh. However, given its perception of Saudi Arabia as 'a sort of *chargé d'affaires* of the US administration in the Middle East', the USSR resented the Saudi (as well as Egyptian) interference in the Lebanese crisis, fearing that the Riyadh conference would be exploited to tempt Syria into the 'reactionary camp'.⁵⁷

In the event, once the Riyadh decisions were confirmed by the Cairo summit conference a week later, the USSR had no choice but to acquiesce. In October Moscow halted its overt criticism of Syria, and from late 1976 onwards a gradual recognition of the legitimacy of Syria's role in Lebanon emerged with the Syrian troops being referred to by the Soviet media as 'peacekeeping forces'.⁵⁸

Subsequently, in each of the Syrian-Israeli crises and clashes over Lebanon during the late 1970s and early 1980s the USSR zealously supported the legitimacy of the Syrian presence in Lebanon. This trend reached its peak during the 1982 Lebanon War and its aftermath. With US influence in Lebanon on the surge and the spectre of a prolonged Israeli presence there looming large, the USSR came to consider the Syrian forces in Lebanon as the only possible barrier to the mounting tide of imperialist aggression. 'Israel wants to use its

presence in Lebanon in order to inflict blows against Syria and its deterrent forces which are on Lebanese territory *in accordance with an Arab League mandate*', argued Radio Moscow. However,

The Syrian leadership is firmly resisting attempts by Washington and its followers to force Syria to abandon *its undertakings to protect Lebanon*. . . . The noble and just role played by Syria in *rescuing Lebanon* from the Israeli beasts consolidates Arab unity and isolates the agents of imperialism in the Arab world.⁵⁹

These expressions of support were accompanied, especially during Andropov's brief period of power, by staunch political and military backing for the relentless Syrian campaign against the Israeli (and American) presence in Lebanon despite the escalatory potential of this policy. Yet, even Andropov took much care to reduce the risk of escalation by making clear to the Syrians that they *could not* expect Soviet intervention on their behalf *in Lebanon*, should events there get out of control.

This attitude of uneasy approval of the Syrian role in Lebanon and fears of its escalatory potential, has persisted during the Gorbachev era and was vividly illustrated during the 'second missile crisis' of December 1985–January 1986. In that crisis, the USSR praised Syria for 'clearing the mines from Lebanon's domestic problems' and defended the legitimacy of its military presence in Lebanon; at the same time Moscow sought to portray the deployment of the surface-to-air missiles as taking place within Syrian territory thereby signalling a measure of disapproval of this action.⁶⁰

Similarly, Moscow watched with mixed feelings the Syrian military pressure on General Aoun's government in 1988 and 1989, hoping that Syria would succeed in restoring order to the turbulent Lebanese system, whilst fearing a new conflagration. When events appeared to get out of control, the Soviets did not hesitate to air their grievances with the Syrians, while simultaneously pressuring other involved parties (e.g. Iraq, the PLO) to contribute, too, to the pacification of the Lebanese conflict.

A DELICATE BALANCE OF WEAKNESS: THE MAKING OF THE BILATERAL TREATY

Though not all meaningful bonds between nations are expressed by, or codified in written treaties, institutionalization of relations through

bilateral or multilateral formal treaties is often considered the best way to gain external commitment to one's foreign policy course. It is for this reason that an examination of the process of treaty-making, namely, the extent of mutual interest in the attainment of the treaty and the intricate web of interactions preceding its conclusion affords an illuminating insight into the dynamics of the respective relationship.

Broadly speaking, bilateral and multilateral political treaties of cooperation may be classified into three categories according to the response required in certain specific contingencies:

- (a) *Defence Pact*. Intervene militarily on the side of any treaty partner that is attacked militarily.
- (b) *Neutrality and Non-Aggression Pact*. Remain militarily neutral if any co-signatory is attacked.
- (c) *Entente*. Consult and/or cooperate in a crisis, including armed attack.⁶¹

Moscow's bilateral treaties with its East European allies, for example, have so far fallen into the first category. They provide for what is often called a 'hair trigger commitment', namely, automatic commitment of the signatories to military action if the *casus foederis* arises. In contrast, Soviet treaties with non-communist Third World countries, including those of the Middle East,⁶² have been an amalgam of the remaining two categories. For one, they invariably state that neither of the signatories will enter into any alliance or join any grouping of states or provide any facility or undertake any obligation, military or otherwise, directed against the other or incompatible with those treaties. Second, in the case of an armed attack or threat thereof, all treaties commit the signatories to 'enter without delay into contact with each other with a view to coordinating their positions and to cooperation in order to remove the threat that has arisen and to restore peace'.⁶³

Significantly, Soviet treaties of friendship and cooperation with Third World countries are ambiguous about the *casus foederis*; they do not spell out clearly the measures that would be adopted to remove potential threats to peace but rather speak of 'coordination,' 'consultations' and 'cooperation'. This vague formulation enables Moscow to avoid unequivocal commitments to Third World clients insufficiently subservient to its wishes, thereby reducing the likelihood of any undesirable engagement in local conflicts. In addition, a vague *casus foederis* helps to remove potential grievances on the part

of Third World allies, many of which are very sensitive to any infringement on their sovereignty.

In May 1971, Egypt became the first Middle Eastern country in the postwar era to sign a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the USSR, and Iraq followed suit a year later. It was only natural, therefore, that Moscow would try to extract a similar agreement from its third major Middle Eastern ally. Hence, as early as May 1972, Moscow reportedly approached Damascus with a request for it to sign a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.⁶⁴ The polite, but firm, Syrian refusal did not dissuade the Soviets from raising the issue two months later during Asad's visit to Moscow, only to be turned down yet again. 'Syria and the USSR are friends', Asad told the Soviets, 'and a real friendship does not require any treaties. The joint experiences and intensive interaction are as meaningful as a treaty and there is no need to formalize them by signed documents'.⁶⁵ Practical considerations apart (e.g. curtailment of the flow of funds from the conservative Arab oil countries), Asad was most anxious not to compromise Syria's independent course in a manner that could tarnish its position or its image in the Arab world.

Thus Asad was no more forthcoming to Soviet approaches in the years after 1973 than he had been before the war. Even the signing of the second Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement in September 1975 did not make him change his mind; in October 1975 Asad rejected another request for a bilateral treaty.⁶⁶ Towards the end of the decade, however, the Syrian position was reversed. Alarmed by the upset of the regional balance of power following Egypt's 'defection from the Arab camp', on the one hand, and by the mounting violent opposition to his regime, on the other, Asad began to view a bilateral treaty with the USSR as an asset rather than a liability. In the increasingly menacing environment of the late 1970s such an agreement could consolidate the stature and prestige of the Syrian regime both domestically and internationally. The possible infringement on Syria's sovereignty of a bilateral treaty, in these circumstances, was dismissed out of hand on the grounds that in those trying days of a growing Israeli threat to the Arab world, it was imperative for all progressive forces to draw a clear distinction between friend and foe, rather than to dwell on formalistic niceties. In Asad's words:

By saying that we are nonaligned, we are not equating the two superpowers. It is impossible and inconceivable to equate the one who gives arms to our enemy to occupy our territories with the one

who gives us arms and political support. . . . Syria befriends those who befriend it and is hostile to those who are hostile to it.⁶⁷

Indeed, from late 1978 onwards it became increasingly evident that in implying his intention to 'befriend the USSR', Asad was not merely after a standard Friendship and Cooperation Treaty but rather sought to tie the USSR in a more binding pact, preferably a defence treaty. On 7 September 1978, following reports that America intended to sign a defence pact with Israel in order to allay the latter's apprehensions over its national security and thus to strengthen its willingness to make territorial concessions, Abd al-Khalim Khaddam called upon the Arab states to respond in kind by entering into defence agreements with the USSR.⁶⁸ A month later, during an Arab summit meeting in Baghdad, Khaddam reportedly threatened that Syria would join the Warsaw Pact should it fail to receive the necessary support from its Arab allies.⁶⁹ Similar reports on Syria's interest in a defence pact with the USSR that would provide, *inter alia*, for the dispatch of Soviet ground forces to Syria in case of dire emergencies, were carried by the Arab and foreign press throughout 1980.⁷⁰

Paradoxically, Syria's growing eagerness to conclude a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty was matched by a diminishing Soviet enthusiasm for such an agreement. However important, a bilateral treaty with Syria had never been perceived by the Soviets as a top priority foreign policy goal. Until October 1973, while the USSR was preoccupied with the prevention of a new Arab-Israeli conflagration, Syria was not viewed as important enough to justify a large Soviet campaign to push it into a bilateral treaty. Conversely, given Syria's ascendancy in Soviet Middle Eastern interests in the aftermath of the October War, the USSR was careful not to antagonize its major regional ally by pushing the issue of a treaty too hard. Furthermore, Soviet-Syrian relations during the Asad era never reached such a low ebb as to create a desperate Soviet need for a formal treaty, as had happened with Egypt. Consequently, differences over the conclusion of such a treaty fell short of developing into a real irritant between Moscow and Damascus, with the USSR foregoing employment of the stick and limiting its attempts at persuasion to the use of the carrot.

The significant weakening of Asad's domestic and regional position in the late 1970s served as a further restraint to the Soviet drive towards a bilateral treaty. A treaty with a confident and strong Syria playing a leading role in the Arab world was one thing, but an accord

with an isolated leader who faced an imminent threat of dethronement was quite another. Moreover, familiar with Asad's propensity for independent conduct, the Soviets apparently feared that a precipitous reaction on his part to the threats facing the regime might drag them into an undesirable predicament. Therefore, not only was a defence pact inconceivable from Moscow's point of view but from 1979 onwards the Soviets surrendered the initiative in the quest for a treaty to Syria and adopted an essentially reactive position on the issue.⁷¹

It was Asad's visit to the USSR in October 1979 which constituted the turning point in Soviet and Syrian approaches towards the issue of a bilateral treaty. If until the visit it had been the USSR that had been interested in a bilateral treaty, from that time onwards it was Syria that worked to bring it about. Hence, it is very likely that Brezhnev's evasion of Asad in October 1979, explained by the Soviets on grounds of poor health, emanated from his reluctance to give a flat refusal to Syrian requests for a bilateral treaty.⁷²

This change of roles between the Soviet Union and Syria is clearly demonstrated by the tone and scope of coverage given to the issue of a bilateral treaty in Moscow and Damascus during the months preceding its conclusion. While Syrian officials and the state-controlled media referred openly and widely to the forthcoming treaty, the Soviet media, as well as government figures and officials, ignored the subject completely. The Soviet media praised the measures taken by the Syrian regime against the Islamic Brotherhood, condemning this organization as an American proxy; they supported Syria's defiance of America's Middle Eastern policy and hailed the Syrian friendship with the USSR. Yet they never mentioned the intensive discussions on a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty that were under way at the time nor did they give any indication of Soviet support for such an eventuality.⁷³

Concluded on 8 October 1980, the Soviet–Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation thus constituted an uneasy compromise, the outcome of a balance of mutual weakness. Reluctant as it was to sign the treaty at that particular time, the USSR could not afford to turn down its major Middle Eastern ally. Syria, for its part, unable to harness an unequivocal Soviet commitment to its national security, in the form of a defence pact, had to content itself with a 'standard' Third World Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.

The major conclusion that emerges from the discussion in this chapter is that neither the 'patron–client' nor the 'tail wags the dog'

paradigms satisfactorily describes the political dynamics of Soviet–Syrian relations. Just as Syria cannot be considered a Soviet client, ‘voluntarily setting its own limits on action and making decisions regarding its foreign policy with one ear to the wishes of the great power’,⁷⁴ so the USSR cannot be labelled a passive, reactive actor, ‘playing to the tune of its weaker allies’. If anything, the Soviet–Syrian relationship should be portrayed in terms of a mutually beneficial strategic interdependence between two allies: a relationship favouring each partner in accordance with the vicissitudes in regional and global affairs.

Both countries have reaped significant, albeit not always symmetrical, political, strategic and economic gains from the relationship. Asad’s Syria has been *the* major Middle Eastern ally for the Soviet Union since the mid-1970s, promoting the fundamental goal of eradicating Western presence and influence in this crucial region on the southern borders of the USSR and offering the USSR an important, if limited, military foothold. Moscow, meanwhile, has been Syria’s main strategic ally: it has supplied military, political and economic aid and been both a counterbalance to the American intervention in the area as well as a deterrent (however minor) to Israel’s ‘aggressive designs’. Soviet military backing and political support is largely responsible for Syria’s success in asserting itself as a leading regional power. And it is mainly thanks to Syria (or at least so it was until the Gorbachev era) that the USSR has not been pushed to the sidelines of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

2 Soviet–Syrian Relations: the Military Dimension

Since the conclusion of the first arms deal between the USSR and Syria in 1955, the military sphere has constituted the pivot of Soviet–Syrian relations. During this period the value of Soviet arms supplies to Syria has exceeded \$20 billion as compared with approximately \$4 billion in economic aid.¹ Moreover, since Asad's rise to power in November 1970, Syria has developed into Moscow's most prominent military client in the Middle East; Soviet military support for Syria during the first half of the 1980s was worth around \$8 billion and surpassed that given to any other Middle Eastern country or, indeed, to entire regions such as Latin America, East Asia or sub-Saharan Africa.²

This chapter analyses the essence of Soviet military support for Syria in an attempt to determine its components and principal features and to assess its utility as a foreign policy instrument.

THE ESSENCE OF MILITARY SUPPORT

Soviet military support comprises two main components: peacetime presence and wartime engagement.³ Peacetime presence can be manifested either in the deployment of advisory missions within the local armed forces or in the maintenance of regular Soviet units within the respective client states (or alternatively, in international waters).

The first type of presence constitutes an integral part of the Soviet Union's military aid programme to its local clients and has nothing to do with direct Soviet military objectives. Arms deals between the USSR and its Third World clients include not only the supply of arms and military equipment but also the provision of technical and advisory services to facilitate the absorption of weapons systems. Since the only objective of the advisory mission is to bridge the gap between the sophistication of the systems supplied and the technological level of the local armed forces, it is only natural that the magnitude of this mission would be a function of the size of these forces, the quantities of weapons they absorb, and their operative

and technological skills. The larger an army, the more weapons it procures, while the lower its operative level, the more extensive the technical and advisory aid it requires. The decision to accept, or alternatively to deploy a vast advisory system extending down to the lower echelons is doubtless a political one, as illustrated by the withdrawal of most Soviet advisers from Syria in early 1990 in disregard of the operational requirements of the local armed forces.⁴ However, once such political readiness is apparent, the size of the relevant advisory mission is determined solely by the aforementioned variables rather than by politically-motivated factors.

While the deployment of an advisory mission is merely a foreign policy instrument, peacetime presence of independent Soviet units in a local state, such as port facilities serving exclusive Soviet objectives, may often be one of the benefits that the USSR derives by supplying military aid, a gain in the superpower competition for assets in the Third World. Even in those cases where such an intervention was intended primarily to aid the client state (for instance, the Egyptian–Israeli War of Attrition), it served the strategic needs of the Soviet Union as well.

Both forms of peacetime presence may be exploited for military support during wartime. For the purposes of this book, all kinds of military support furnished to regional clients by Soviet advisory missions deployed in the local armed forces will be defined as *military involvement*. *Military intervention*, on the other hand, refers to armed activities performed by regular Soviet units on behalf of a local ally. Military intervention can be manifested in a wide spectrum of activities ranging from shows of force designed to fulfil deterrent functions, to defensive/supportive missions such as intelligence gathering and electronic-warfare activities, to direct engagement in the fighting (e.g. defence of naval routes, a naval blockade).

Needless to say, intervention indicates a higher degree of willingness on the part of the Soviet Union to support the local state. The existence of an advisory mission in the local army and its participation in the fighting is a relatively subtle means of support and does not imply a direct Soviet engagement in the military and strategic affairs of the particular region. By contrast, an independent presence and, much more so, wartime intervention create a direct confrontation between Soviet regular units and neighbouring Third World states; as such they have far greater political and strategic implications at both the regional and global levels than involvement alone.

PEACETIME SUPPORT

Asad's advent to power aroused apprehensions in Moscow about the future of Soviet-Syrian military relations. The generous Soviet support to Syria in the wake of the Six-Day War (Syria's losses were fully replaced within less than a year of the termination of hostilities) failed to impress Asad, who, in his anxiety to extricate himself from the humiliating defeat of 1967, was looking for scapegoats. One was found in the form of Soviet military aid to Syria which, according to Asad, consisted of 'obsolete and sub-standard' weaponry that fell short of Syria's military needs.⁵ Since Asad believed that this procurement policy reflected Moscow's determination to prevent Syria from reaching the stage where it would be able to launch a war, he argued that Damascus should respond in kind by diversifying its weapons sources. Such a diversification, Asad maintained, would not only improve Syria's manoeuvrability *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union but would also enhance its military potential by providing it with the same weapons systems that Israel used.⁶

Notwithstanding Asad's dissatisfaction with Moscow's procurement policy (in May 1969 the then chief of staff, Mustafa Tlas visited China, reportedly in search for arms) he was fully aware that by the time of his ascendancy to power, Syria's military dependence on the USSR had become pronounced. Given his commitment to a military solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Asad knew that there was no real substitute for Soviet arms. Re-equipment of the Syrian armed forces would be an extremely complex and prolonged process that could lead to the indefinite postponement of the military option. Furthermore, the diversification of Syria's weapons systems would complicate military cooperation with Egypt, a prerequisite for any military initiative.

Nor was Asad unaware of the crucial contribution of Soviet technical and operational support to the enhancement of Syria's military competence. Totalling some 1000 advisers and technicians, the Soviet mission was deployed within all the branches of the Syrian armed forces (with a special emphasis on the aerial and air-defence fields) thus supporting the Syrian military in a wide spectrum of activities. These ranged from assistance in the assembly and maintenance of weapons systems, through training of local personnel to participation in planning and implementation of on-going operational activities.⁷

Against this backdrop, realism prevailed over rhetoric: in February 1971, Asad visited Moscow and concluded his first arms deal with the

USSR and in July 1972 he declined Sadat's advice to follow the Egyptian example and to expel the Soviet advisers from Syria.⁸ The scope and intensity of Soviet arms deliveries to Syria rose sharply in 1972 following the signing of three consecutive arms deals, in May, July and December. From mid-1972 until the outbreak of the October War, the Syrian armed forces absorbed large quantities of weapons allowing for reorganization and a significant build-up. These consignments included some 750 tanks (mostly T-54/55 and a few T-62s), 100 artillery pieces as well as FROG-7 surface-to-surface missiles, capable of striking Israeli targets in the Galilee. The Syrian air force, for its part, doubled its complement of MiG-21 combat aircraft from 100 to 200, increased its airborne transport capability from 12 to 50 transport helicopters, and boosted its air-defence potential with the installation of 20 SA-3 and SA-6 surface-to-air missile batteries.

These extensive arms transfers did not, however, fully correspond to Asad's expectations⁹ since the USSR would not supply Syria with certain major weapons systems, MiG-23 aircraft and SCUD surface-to-surface missiles in particular. Yet this limited disappointment neither caused any rift in Syrian-Soviet relations nor affected the functioning of the Soviet advisory mission. Although the senior Soviet advisers were kept outside the actual planning of the war, the Syrians did not constrain the activity and freedom of movement of Soviet military personnel. Western press reports in this regard¹⁰ should therefore be treated as either part of the Syrian disinformation campaign that preceded the war or as an Israeli, or American, propaganda effort to compound the USSR's problems within the Arab world.

Moreover, Asad was fully aware that, unlike in the Egyptian case, delays in weapons supplies were not related to political considerations but were largely the outcome of bureaucratic constraints, namely, reluctance to deliver specific weapons systems to a local ally before the elapse of a minimum time period (three to four years in the case of combat aircraft) from their acquisition by the Soviet armed forces. Since the MiG-23 had only been introduced into operational service in the Soviet air force in 1971, its supply to the Arabs in 1972 or 1973 was virtually inconceivable regardless of the imminence of regional conflict.¹¹

This pattern of close military cooperation was consolidated as a result of the October War. As will be shown shortly, in that war the USSR aided Syria in several fundamental areas, particularly by

Table 2.1 Major weapons systems used by the Syrian armed forces:
October 1973 and May 1975

	<i>October 1973</i>	<i>War losses</i>	<i>May 1975</i>
Tanks	1500	c. 1000	2200
Armoured vehicles	1000	unknown	1200
Artillery pieces	900	about 400	800
Surface-to-air missile batteries	30	15	40
Combat aircraft	310	c 200	350
Missile boats	8	5	9

replacing the bulk of Syria's war losses even before hostilities ended. Immediately after the war, the Soviets energetically began to reconstruct the Syrian armed forces, completing this effort by mid-1975. This process was expressed not only in quantitative terms but also in the qualitative upgrading of the level of the Syrian arsenal through the supply of modern weapons systems (MiG-23 aircraft, SCUD-B missiles) which Syria had not possessed previously. The scope of Soviet arms supplies to Syria during that period enabled a considerable expansion and modernization of the Syrian army: the transformation of three divisions from infantry into mechanized units and the formation of three additional independent brigades, one infantry and two mechanized. This expansion led, in turn, to the doubling of the Soviet advisory mission in Syria, from 1000 to 2000 personnel.

With the recovery of the Syrian armed forces from their débâcle, Soviet-Syrian military relations entered a period of stability which was to last until the summer of 1979 with a brief interruption in late 1976 when an arms embargo was in force following Syria's armed intervention in Lebanon. This period was characterized by small-scale arms deals, designed to maintain the political momentum in Soviet-Syrian relations rather than to serve purely military purposes. More specifically, from mid-1975 to the summer of 1979, the Syrian ground forces received about 400 tanks (T-55s and T-62s), some 500 armoured vehicles, approximately 100 artillery pieces and a number of FROG-7 and SCUD-B surface-to-surface missile launchers. The Syrian air force absorbed some 50 fighting aircraft while air defences were bolstered with 20 surface-to-air missile batteries (SA-2, SA-3 and SA-6).

Interestingly enough, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 and the ensuing peace process did not generate an immediate acceleration in Syria's procurement relations with the USSR. The Soviets praised the 'principled' Syrian struggle against Egypt's 'capitulationist course', voiced in private their understanding for Syria's intention to restore the strategic balance upset by Sadat's move and agreed to conclude a \$500 million arms deal in February 1978. Yet they failed to provide the weaponry required for the attainment of this ambitious goal.

It was only in the summer of 1979, six months after the signing of the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty, that the Soviets apparently agreed to elevate Syria's military potential to a higher qualitative and quantitative level: in August 1979 Syria took the first delivery of T-72 tanks, and two months later Asad went to Moscow where he signed the largest arms deal until then, thus setting in train an accelerated process of military expansion, unprecedented in scope and intensity even when compared with the post-1973 rehabilitation effort.

In qualitative terms, the Syrians received a wide variety of items from the latest generation of Soviet weaponry, including T-72 tanks, 122 mm and 152 mm self-propelled guns, MiG-25 aircraft, Mi-24 assault helicopters, and SA-8 surface-to-air missiles. Quantitatively speaking and by the completion of the implementation of this large arms deal in mid-1982, the Syrian ground forces had absorbed some 1400 tanks (including 800 T-72s), nearly 2000 armoured vehicles, and approximately 1700 artillery pieces. This equipment enabled substantial reorganization and modernization of the Syrian ground forces most notably by the establishment of two additional armoured divisions.¹²

Syria also received about 200 combat aircraft, including 25 MiG-25s, 30 SU-20/22s, and an unknown number of improved MiG-23 interceptors which the Syrians had not previously utilized. The Syrian air defence system was similarly augmented, doubling in strength from 50 to nearly 100 surface-to-air missile batteries. The Syrian navy was also reinforced through the addition of four OSA-2 missile boats. As in the immediate post-1973 years, the expansion of the Syrian armed forces following the 1979 arms deal was accompanied by a growth in the Soviet advisory mission from 2000 to about 2500 personnel.¹³

The 1982 Lebanon War constituted another milestone in the evolution of Soviet–Syrian military relations. Although the Soviets did

Table 2.2 Expansion of the Syrian armed forces: October 1979 and mid-1982.

	<i>October 1979</i>	<i>Mid-1982</i>
<i>Weaponry</i>		
Tanks	2600	4000
Armoured vehicles	1600	3500
Artillery pieces	900	2600
Fighting aircraft	400	600
Surface-to-air		
missile batteries	50	100
Missile boats	14	18
<i>Manpower and formations</i>		
Manpower, total ('000)	247	310
Armoured divisions	2	4
Mechanized divisions	3	2
Independent brigades	9	10

not accept Asad's view regarding the desirable extent of Syria's military expansion, they nevertheless had several important reasons to support a substantial build-up of the Syrian armed forces. First, the chill between Moscow and Baghdad at the time and the deterioration in Soviet–Iranian relations highlighted Syria's prominence for the USSR's Middle Eastern position, and made the recovery of the Syrian armed forces from their (however limited) *débâcle* a vital Soviet objective. This goal became especially urgent given the likelihood of resumed Syrian–Israeli hostilities and the strong position of the Israeli forces in Lebanon, deployed merely four kilometres from the Syrian–Lebanese border and less than 30 km from Damascus. Second, by destroying 20 surface-to-air missile batteries and by shooting down some ninety of Syria's front-line interceptor aircraft without suffering a single casualty, the Israeli air force had exposed the weakness of a Soviet-type air defence system, dealing yet another painful blow to the reputation of Soviet weaponry. Given the USSR's own reliance on much the same systems for the defence of its own airspace, a prompt response to the challenge posed by Israel became not only a matter of recovering lost prestige but also a pressing operational need.¹⁴ Finally, the Soviets could hardly afford to remain indifferent to the growing American activity in both the Lebanese and the Middle East arenas which threatened to push the USSR yet again to the sidelines of regional politics.

Hence, the Soviets indulged in an industrious effort to reconstruct the Syrian armed forces. Not only were Syria's war losses fully replaced but its military potential was significantly enhanced and upgraded. Between the end of the Lebanon War in June 1982 and the beginning of 1984, Syria's aerial and air defence forces were strengthened by the arrival of about 140 fighting aircraft, and approximately 70 surface-to-air missile batteries (mainly SA-6s and SA-8s). The Syrian army received some 600 tanks, a few hundred armoured vehicles, and about 1000 artillery pieces.¹⁵ These large quantities of arms enabled Syria to expand the order-of-battle of its army from six to eight divisions and the overall size of the regular armed forces from 310,000 to 450,000–500,000 troops. A direct corollary of this process was the expansion of the Soviet military mission in Syria by a few hundred advisers to nearly 3000 personnel.

Syria's strategic posture was decisively buttressed during 1983 by the arrival of two SA-5 surface-to-air missile brigades and an unspecified number of SS-21 surface-to-surface missiles.¹⁶ Apart from the prestige attending their arrival, the SS-21s, with a range of 120 km and far greater accuracy than anything in the Syrian arsenal, improved Syria's ability to hit military and economic targets in northern Israel thereby partly counterbalancing Israel's long-range bombing capacity. In addition, the extended range of the SA-5 (250–300 km) improved the Syrian air defence capability, in particular against high-flying reconnaissance, intelligence and electronic-warfare aircraft. Finally, the Soviets supplied Damascus with SSC-1 long-range anti-ship missiles which significantly improved Syria's coastal defence capabilities.¹⁷

With the expansion of the Syrian armed forces completed in early 1984, Soviet arms transfers to Syria dropped sharply. From 1984 to date, the amount of major weapons systems at the disposal of the Syrian armed forces has remained essentially unchanged, though their quality has been improved following the absorption of new weapons systems such as MiG-29 and SU-24 aircraft, submarines, and SA-13 surface-to-air missiles. While this dramatic slowdown in arms supplies to Syria has been essentially motivated by Chernenko's and Gorbachev's anxiety to curb Asad's tireless quest for 'strategic parity' it has also reflected Damascus's diminishing capacity for military expansion resulting from severe manpower and economic constraints.

For one, since the mid-1980s Syria has faced a most unfortunate combination of steep economic decline, higher weaponry prices, and reduced ability (and willingness) of the Arab oil states to subsidize

Syria's military acquisitions following both the oil glut and the Syrian support for Iran in its war with Iraq. Second, by the mid-1980s Syria's regular army had developed into a nearly 500,000 strong force, larger by 11 per cent than the Egyptian armed forces, although Syria's population (c. 11.5 million) is merely one fifth of that of Egypt (c. 54 million). Since the Syrian regular forces – over one-quarter of whom are delayed-release conscripts and reservists – account for about 20 per cent of the labour force, the heavy burden imposed by the military build-up on the Syrian economy becomes more than evident.¹⁸ Finally, despite the large size of the Syrian armed forces, they have been unable to master the tremendous amount of weaponry at their disposal. For example, according to several assessments, only 2800 tanks out of the 4000 in the Syrian arsenal are fully operational; the rest are employed as static anti-tank weapons or stored in large stockpiles.¹⁹

It is against this backdrop that Asad has been forced to recognize that the legs of the Syrian economy are too weak to carry too large an army. Accordingly, from late 1986 onwards, a process of cutbacks in the Syrian ground forces has been implemented, with regular units being dismantled and transferred to reserve status and their weaponry put in storage.

WARTIME SUPPORT

Since Asad's rise to power in November 1970, Syria has fought three wars against Israel. Two of those, the October War (6–24 October 1973) and the ensuing War of Attrition (5 February–31 May 1974) were initiated by Damascus; the third, the Lebanon War (6–25 June 1982) was launched by Israel. In all these armed confrontations the USSR extended military support to Syria in the form of both involvement and intervention. The widest and most impressive supportive effort took place during the *October War*.

Despite its opposition to the outbreak of the October War and its anxiety to contain the war at its earliest stage, Moscow moved quickly to aid the Arabs once hostilities were underway. Indeed, the October War precipitated the first massive Soviet resupply effort to a Third World belligerent in the course of full hostilities. Carried out simultaneously by sea and air, it began a day after the onset of hostilities; by the end of the war, the USSR had airlifted to Syria some 4360 tons of war *matériel* while some 38,210 tons were sent by sea.²⁰

Table 2.3 Expansion of the Syrian armed forces: 1982-9

	Mid- 1982	War losses	1984	1986	1989
<i>Weaponry</i>					
Tanks	4000	c. 400	4100	4200	4050
Armoured vehicles	3500	few hundreds	3500	3600	3850
Artillery pieces	2600	unknown	3500	3800	2300
Fighting aircraft	600	90	650	650	650
SAM batteries	100	c. 20	150	150	150
Missile boats	18	—	22	24	22
Submarines	—	—	—	—	3
<i>Manpower and formations</i>					
Total ('000)	310	—	450-500	450-500	400
Armoured divisions	4		5	5	5
Mechanized divisions	2		3	3	3
Special operations divisions	—		—	1	1
Independent brigades	10		17	10	7

As a rule, the sea- and airlift did not suffer direct attacks by Israeli forces. However, there were a few exceptions. Several Soviet transport aircraft were destroyed on the ground during the airlift, and a merchant ship, *Ilya Mechnikov*, was accidentally sunk in the port of Tartus on 12 October by Israeli missiles that were being fired at Syrian missile boats.²¹

Moscow's reaction to the sinking of the *Ilya Mechnikov* was prompt and angry. On 12 October, only a few hours after the incident, the Soviet news agency, *TASS*, issued its first warning to Israel: 'The USSR cannot regard indifferently the criminal actions of the Israeli military as a result of which there are victims also among Soviet citizens'. Thus Israel must 'strictly observe . . . the international laws including those regarding the freedom of navigation. The continuation of criminal acts by Israel will lead to grave consequences to Israel itself'.

The flow of arms into Syria was paralleled by the wide range of activities performed by the Soviet advisory mission, which was deployed within the Syrian armed forces. Plain clothes Soviet air force technicians reassembled the fighter aircraft that were shipped to Syria in the air- and sealift; Soviet advisers drove tanks from Latakia and Tartus to Damascus; and Soviet engineers repaired military equipment damaged in the fighting. Soviet advisers remained in Syrian command posts at every echelon, from battalion upwards. However, they did not participate in frontline fighting.²²

Soviet support to Syria during the October War was not confined to arms shipments and advisory assistance but was also manifested in supportive activities performed by regular Soviet units. About a week after the outbreak of hostilities, air defence missile units operated and controlled by Soviet personnel were deployed at Latakia and in the Damascus area, presumably to protect the air- and sealift.²³ The Mediterranean Squadron, for its part, conducted surveillance activities against the Sixth Fleet as well as naval operations in support of the Arab war effort. These included intelligence-gathering by two ships operating opposite the Israeli coast, and the protection of the air- and sealift. On 13 October, a day after the sinking of the *Ilya Mechnikov*, Soviet warships appeared to the north and east of Cyprus whose aim was to protect Soviet merchant ships carrying arms to Syria. These ships remained near the Syrian coast until the end of hostilities departing some time between 24 and 26 October.²⁴

The October War also witnessed two Soviet threats to dispatch ground forces to the combat zone. The second – the better known – was made on 24 October when the Soviet Union implied that it would send troops to Egypt if Israel did not immediately halt its advance. The first was related to events on the Syrian front.

On 10 October, after the recapture of the Golan Heights by Israel, the USSR placed at least three of its seven airborne divisions on advanced alert.²⁵ Three days later, when Israeli troops crossed the ‘purple line’ and began advancing towards Damascus, Moscow warned Israel through Kissinger that Soviet airborne forces were now on the alert to move to the defence of Damascus.²⁶ These indirect warnings were paralleled by *unconfirmed* reports indicating that the advanced staff of a Soviet airborne division had been settled in Syrian headquarters at Qatana outside Damascus.²⁷

It is difficult to assess the impact of the Soviet threat on Israel’s decision to avoid further thrusts into Syria; there were other weighty

military and political considerations which may well have been decisive in themselves. None the less, according to a leading Israeli analyst, 'when to these considerations were added the Soviet interest in the security of Damascus and the Soviet threats, it was obviously not in Israel's interest to advance beyond a point from which Damascus could be threatened by Israeli artillery fire'.²⁸

If the October War offers one of the more prominent examples of wide-scale Soviet military engagement in a local war, the *Syrian–Israeli War of Attrition*, which raged along the Golan Heights for nearly four months, witnessed only limited direct Soviet engagement mainly in the form of arms supplies and modest advisory support. Nevertheless, this war constituted an important landmark in the evolution of Soviet-bloc intervention in Third World interstate wars: it was the first case where *regular Cuban forces* were employed in the service of Soviet foreign policy.

As early as November 1973, a short while after the guns had fallen silent along the Golan, two Cuban armoured brigades were airlifted to Syria. Arriving without their heavy weaponry, they were equipped with Soviet tanks and were deployed in rear areas where they became involved in the training of Syrian tank crews. At the end of January 1974, following the signing of the Egyptian–Israeli disengagement agreement, the Cuban brigades were transferred to the front to reinforce Syrian forces on the Hermon Mountain. With the outbreak of hostilities in early February, the Cuban units took an active part in the fighting. This combat experience, however, cost them dearly. According to some reports, Cuban casualties in the War of Attrition amounted to approximately 180 killed and 200 wounded (out of a total of 2000 Cubans in Syria). This high rate of losses was reflected by the substitution of most of the Cuban troops in Syria with fresh reinforcements in late February and early March 1974.²⁹ The Cuban units remained in Syria for more than a year after the termination of hostilities, until they were flown to Angola in the autumn of 1975.

Contrary to the common wisdom, Soviet support for Syria during the 1982 *Lebanon war* contained all the ingredients of past military conduct. The only difference between the Soviet activities during the 1982 war and on previous occasions was one of degree, a difference that derives from the limited nature of the Lebanon War. Unlike the October War, which involved the entire Syrian and Egyptian armed forces, only one third of the Syrian army (two out of six divisions) took part in the 1982 War. Consequently, and given the impressive build-up of the Syrian armed forces between 1979 and 1982, Syria's

losses appeared negligible. For example, in the Lebanon war the Syrians lost only 10 per cent of their tanks (400 out of 4000) compared with 66 per cent in the October War (1000 out of 1500). Even in the aerial and air defence fields, where Syria suffered the most telling blows, the losses did not resemble those of the 1973 war: 20 per cent in surface-to-air missile batteries (20 out of 100) and 15 per cent in combat aircraft (90 out of 600) compared with 50 per cent and 65 per cent respectively.

Syria's ability to sustain the war losses made the question of wartime resupply far less acute than in the October War. In fact, the most critical war losses, particularly in the air defence field, were already compensated for during the course of hostilities; by 10 June, four days after the onset of hostilities, a modest Soviet airlift, consisting of three or four daily flights by IL-76 transport aircraft, was already delivering to Syria surface-to-air missiles and crated planes. Seaborne arms began arriving a week later with six merchant ships reported to have unloaded military equipment – including tanks, armoured vehicles and surface-to-air missiles – at Syrian ports.³⁰ Soviet arms transfers were significantly accelerated immediately after the war and, within a short time, all Syria's war losses were replaced.

Since the USSR had strictly avoided any permanent presence of its advisers within the Syrian forces deployed in Lebanon, no Soviet personnel were engaged in the ground fighting. Consequently, Soviet advisory support was limited to the aerial and air defence fields outside Lebanese territory. On 13 June, this involvement was highlighted by the arrival in Damascus of a Soviet military delegation, headed by General Yevgeny Yurasov, first deputy commander-in-chief of the Soviet air defence forces. Besides attending an official meeting with the Syrian minister of defence, the Soviet delegation held several working sessions with their Syrian counterparts discussing the ways and means of countering the challenge posed by the Israeli air force.³¹ Within a few days of Yurasov's departure the Soviets were reported to have delivered to Syria a number of SA-8 missile batteries and to have employed them, from Syrian territory, against the Israeli air force.³²

At the same time the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron was enlarged by nine ships (bringing the total to 39) and a naval task force was deployed in the eastern Mediterranean, thus placing some combatants in immediate proximity to the battle zone. During this period there was also a significant growth in the volume of communications between Soviet airborne divisions. The exact nature of this excep-

tional activity, as well as the reason for its occurrence, was not entirely clear, but there is evidence that at least one airborne division was placed on alert.³³

MILITARY SUPPORT: HOW PROFITABLE?

Broadly speaking, Moscow's main reward for its military support for Syria has been of an indirect and elusive nature, namely, the consolidation of Syria's pro-Soviet orientation and the augmentation of the bilateral relationship. It is of course true that this development cannot be solely attributed to military support; it has also been considerably influenced by other dimensions of the Soviet-Syrian relationship, not to mention Asad's own perception of Syria's national interest. Yet the fact that by 1990 Soviet-bloc military support has come to account for nearly 95 per cent of Syria's arms procurement implies a mutual interdependence which neither party can ignore. On top of this, military aid has rendered the Soviets some modest, though tangible, gains in each of the economic, political or strategic spheres. If until the early 1970s Soviet arms sales to the Middle East had been conducted on an essentially non-economic basis, being more a financial burden than an asset,³⁴ the accumulation of large amounts of hard currency in the hands of the oil-producing countries during the 1970s presented the USSR with the opportunity to try to cut the economic costs to it of allied arms procurement. Hence, from 1973 onwards, the USSR began to pressure its Middle Eastern allies to pay in hard currency for their military acquisitions. Although this pattern was largely applied to oil-exporting countries, with which most arms deals were concluded on a cash basis, it did not skip Damascus. Until the early 1980s, and in particular following the Baghdad Summit of 1978 which promised Syria an annual contribution of about \$1.8 billion, a substantial portion of Syria's arms acquisitions were reportedly financed by external actors: Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and the members of the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation (e.g. Libya, Algeria). With economic prosperity replaced by the oil glut of the early 1980s, Arab financial contributions to Syria's military build-up dropped decisively, placing Soviet-Syrian procurement relations yet again on a less profitable basis.

If the economic benefits of military support have been quite modest, its political utility has proved even more questionable,

especially with regard to high political decisions. As shown in the preceding chapter, military dependence on the USSR prevented Syria neither from going to war in 1973 against Moscow's wishes, nor from negotiating a disengagement agreement with Israel under America's auspices, nor from intensifying its military intervention in Lebanon in 1976.

This state of affairs reflects the complex and paradoxical nature of donor–recipient relationships. While extensive military support creates a heavy enduring dependence of the recipient on the donor, it also severely constrains the supplier's ability to exercise effective influence. Having provided a specific client with large quantities of weapons and war *matériel*, the donor – should it decide to employ this relationship coercively – often finds itself in an all or nothing situation: either to use the arms lever vigorously, or to forgo its employment altogether. This is because limited sanctions against a well-armed local ally would have a negligible effect on its operational capability, whereas extreme measures, such as total arms embargo, could generate a rift between the supplier and the recipient. Assuming that the wide scope of military support reflects the intensity of the donor's interest in the recipient state, and given the extreme sensitivity of many Third World countries to any encroachment on their sovereignty, it is only natural for the great powers to use their arms leverage very cautiously. Indeed, during the last two decades only three cases of Soviet coercive tactics in its relations with Syria have been recorded: the arms embargoes of early 1974 and late 1976, and Gorbachev's manipulations of arms supplies in the late 1980s. Moreover the arms embargoes of the 1970s were limited in scope and duration, and were taken half-heartedly as a means of last resort. Once the reason for their imposition had been mitigated, they were quickly removed.

Even Gorbachev's more protracted coercive policy has damaged Syria's political prestige more than its military potential:

- (a) Notwithstanding the drastic drop in arms supplies, Gorbachev has enabled the qualitative improvement of the Syrian armed forces by supplying them with front-line weaponry such as MIG-29 and SU-24 aircraft.
- (b) Given Syria's diminishing capacity for military expansion, Damascus could not have absorbed large quantities of Soviet weaponry even if the Soviets were willing to 'provide the merchandise'.

It is the *strategic* sphere, thus, which has yielded the most visible returns for Soviet military support. Here benefits have been expressed through receipt of limited military installations on a long-term basis, serving exclusive Soviet objectives with no direct reference to Syria's military needs, and operated solely by Soviet personnel. From May 1976 onwards the Soviets have operated maintenance and docking services at the port of Tartus, which have been significantly upgraded in 1988 to meet the operational needs of the Mediterranean Squadron.³⁵ In addition, since the early 1980s the USSR has kept in Syria several electronically-configured aircraft designed for electronic-warfare purposes and flown by Soviet pilots.³⁶

The relatively limited nature of Soviet independent presence in Syria, as compared with that in Egypt in 1970-72, is often taken as an indication of Asad's zealous guard of his country's independent course. Such a view, nevertheless, presents a partial and somewhat distorted picture of the Soviet-Syrian military relationship. Syria's reluctance to allow too wide a regular Soviet peacetime presence on its soil has always been matched by lack of Soviet enthusiasm to expand its presence. True, the denial of Egyptian ports to the USSR in March 1976 has significantly increased the Soviet dependence on naval facilities in Syria. However, once these facilities had been obtained within a couple of months after the Egyptian setback, the Soviets have never sought to expand their independent naval presence to other spheres, beyond the minimum supportive requirements for their Mediterranean Squadron.

Apart from the endemic congestion of the port of Tartus which has largely reduced its value for Soviet naval operations (and accounts for the most recent improvement works there), Moscow's reluctance to enlarge its military presence in Syria reflects a wider behavioural pattern, namely, maintenance of the lowest necessary, rather than the highest possible, level of independent military presence in the Middle East. Thus the only *permanent* peacetime presence of regular Soviet units in the region to date has been confined to the naval sphere, with the consequent by-products of naval facilities on local soil and some measure of aerial reconnaissance. But here, too, the Soviets have maintained a low-key policy: as long as they could rely on Egyptian naval facilities, they did not seek to construct or obtain additional naval complexes in the Mediterranean. Only when they were denied access to these facilities did the Soviets initiate an extensive search for adequate substitutes.

If anything, this circumscribed approach reflects an underlying

Soviet scepticism regarding the value of an independent peacetime presence. For one, the USSR appears to have been fully aware that 'an extensive presence is no assurance of influence. . . . A presence is important in assuring access to decision-makers, but access, taken by itself, is no guarantee of influence'.³⁷ After all, has not Egypt, 'being equipped with Soviet arms and finding itself in a state of military confrontation with Israel, contrived to make a U-turn. So did Iran, armed to its teeth by the United States, if in a different form'.³⁸

In addition to its awareness of the limited value of peacetime presence as a tool of influence, Moscow has not failed to recognize the potentially adverse consequences of such a presence. The existence of an advisory mission within a local army has more than once become a major source of friction between the USSR and the respective Arab client state; the presence of independent Soviet units on local soil, moreover, has given rise to feelings of hostility and frustration among local circles who felt that their country's sovereignty had been compromised. Furthermore, by deploying independent units in a Middle Eastern country, the USSR runs the risk of becoming a direct party to a regional conflict, thus pressing the United States to respond in kind, especially if one of its allies is threatened by Soviet intervention. Such a development would undoubtedly provide all the makings of a superpower crisis, and it would be the Soviets' least desired outcome.

This explains Moscow's reluctance to install air defence units in Egypt in 1970,³⁹ as well as its uneasiness about keeping them in place once the War of Attrition ended. Had it not been for the public humiliation attending Sadat's unilateral expulsion of Soviet personnel from Egypt in July 1972, Moscow would have been relieved to avoid the perils of keeping these units in Egypt. Indeed, both the Soviet air defence units that appeared in Syria during the October War and after the 1982 Lebanon War and the Soviet troops manning the SS-21 missiles were quickly and quietly withdrawn, having handed control over to the Syrians.

All in all, then, the record of Soviet military support to Syria demonstrates the limits of this foreign policy instrument. It is true, of course, that military aid has constituted the main foundation of the edifice of Soviet-Syrian relations. However, viewed against the immense financial investments and formidable political risks attending this sphere of the bilateral relationship, the returns for Soviet aid to

Syria have been clearly outweighed by its costs. In the absence of a better alternative to sustain its influence in Damascus, Moscow's anxiety to stabilize the Middle East, so as to cut down the different costs of its military commitments there, is not difficult to understand.⁴⁰

3 The Economics of Soviet Policy towards Syria

Although the military dimension has figured prominently in Soviet–Syrian relations from their very inception, it is only during the Asad era that it has come to predominate so overwhelmingly all other aspects of the bilateral relationship; until then, the military dimension was always balanced by corresponding activity in the economic sphere, as evidenced, for example, by the signing of the 1957 large-scale economic agreement in the wake of the 1955 and 1956 arms deals. Moreover, under the left-wing regime of 1966–70, the centre of gravity in Soviet–Syrian relations lay in the economic, rather than the military sphere.

Anxious to boost its domestic and international standing through economic exploits, the left-wing regime came to rely heavily on Soviet aid in virtually all economic sectors including industry, agriculture, irrigation, communications, transport and cadre training. The largest Soviet aid project, described by the regime as ‘the basis of our socialist economic system’, was launched in April 1966 in the form of an agreement on bilateral cooperation in the research, planning and building of the first stage of a huge dam and power plant on the Euphrates river. According to the agreement, the Soviets were to give Syria the necessary equipment and construction materials and to lend it 120 million roubles (\$132 million) at 2.5 per cent interest payable over twelve years in instalments commencing within one year after the completion of the first stage of the construction, expected to take place in 1973.¹

Syria’s growing economic dependence on the USSR aroused domestic criticism. One of the more outspoken opponents of this policy was Asad, who, in his capacity as minister of defence and commander of the air force, reportedly argued that the regime’s obsessive pre-occupation with economic development had resulted in the neglect of the armed forces and, in consequence, in the 1967 débâcle. Though this criticism was largely motivated by Asad’s desire to extricate himself from the Six-Day War defeat and improve his position *vis-à-vis* the other contenders for leadership, it certainly reflected both Asad’s resentment of Damascus’s dependence on Moscow and his propensity for greater liberalization of the Syrian economy.

Indeed, Asad's rise to power was accompanied by a series of measures aimed at liberalizing the Syrian economy through the encouragement of the private sector and the attraction of foreign investments. In January 1971, a decree was issued which allowed the private sector to carry out import transactions provided that foreign currency was not transferred from the country. A year later the government sought to encourage transit trade and tourism by introducing a new system of duty-free zones and markets in Syria. In early 1974 the regime issued some new regulations which abolished certain restrictions on foreign trade and encouraged the investment of Arab oil money and other foreign private capital in the country.²

These liberalization measures, nevertheless, heralded neither anti-Soviet turn, nor even slowdown in Soviet-Syrian economic relations. Already Asad's first official visit to Moscow in February 1971 indicated that economic ties, too, would be carefully nourished, and in 1972 several agreements on economic and technical cooperation were concluded providing for the development of the oil industry, the railway system and the country's water resources. Moreover, in late 1972 and early 1973, the two countries institutionalized their economic relations by forming a joint committee for economic and technical cooperation to handle all aspects of economic interaction.

The October 1973 War and the ensuing negotiations on disengagement agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbours led to the further intensification of Soviet-Syrian economic relations as the USSR employed its economic aid as a means to pre-empt the evolution of US-Syrian cooperation. Accordingly, in his visits to Damascus in February-March 1974, the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, sought to 'lure' Syria from an American-inspired agreement by reportedly offering Damascus \$2.2 billion to cover the economic damages suffered in the October War.³ A month later, in April 1974, large-scale economic (and military) agreements were signed during Asad's visit to Moscow.

By the mid-1970s, then, Soviet-Syrian economic relations had become far closer than during the period of the left-wing regime. With some fifty projects underway, Soviet economic aid formed the basis for the development of the Syrian infrastructure in agriculture (e.g. growing of cotton, farm mechanization, cattle breeding), transportation (development of the railway system, ports), and industry, whereby the Soviet Union provided substantial aid to Syria's oil industry by increasing the state's oil storage capacity and assisting Syria to set up its national drilling company. As for Soviet-Syrian

trade during that period, it grew steadily from an annual average of \$36.7 million exports and \$24.1 million imports during the 1966–70 period, to \$137.5 million and \$95.6 million respectively in 1975.

In these circumstances the two countries were clearly satisfied with the development of bilateral economic relations. 'The dam on the Euphrates river will remain for many generations a symbol of friendship between the Syrian and Soviet peoples, a symbol of our creative cooperation', stated the Syrian minister for the Euphrates Dam, Munir Wannus; and the Syrian prime minister, Abd al-Rahman Khulayfawi, praised Soviet aid for helping to 'liberate and develop our national economy, and remove it from the control of foreign monopolies'. In his view, 'these huge projects will directly or indirectly help us overcome the legacy of backwardness and change the structure of our national economy; they will place us on the path of building a developed economy based on developed agriculture and industry'.⁴

The USSR, for its part, was somewhat disturbed by Syria's intensifying trade with Western Europe – in 1975 West European trade accounted for 53.8 per cent of Syria's exports and 49 per cent of its imports as compared with 22.4 per cent and 16.6 per cent respectively from East-bloc countries. However, given Moscow's awareness that Syrian–Western trade relations were no novel development but rather a longstanding trend which dated back to the early 1960s, it reconciled itself to the need for future coexistence with this phenomenon and took comfort in the fact that the lion's share of Syria's trade with the West was directed towards West Europe rather than the United States. The Soviets were also relieved to learn that the liberalization measures taken by the Asad regime did not change the overall structure of the Syrian economy, leaving the public sector 'to play a leading role in the Syrian economy accounting for over three-quarters of gross industrial output'.⁵

The consolidation of Soviet–Syrian economic relations continued apace throughout the latter part of the 1970s: on 24 January 1976 the two countries signed a five-year trade agreement providing for the export of Syrian crude oil, cotton products and wool in exchange for Soviet machinery and industrial equipment. In April 1977, during Asad's visit to Moscow, a wide economic and technical cooperation agreement was signed, stipulating Soviet technical assistance in irrigation and reclamation works as well as the expansion of Syria's railway system. In October 1979, the Soviets took a major step towards meeting Damascus's economic needs by agreeing to write off

\$500 million of Syria's military and economic debt.⁶ During this period the Soviets also increased their involvement in Syria's oil sector, signing in late 1975 a protocol on large-scale oil prospection and in 1976, a five-year programme on comprehensive development of Syria's oil industry.⁷

Oil was first discovered in Syria in the late 1950s by a joint US–West German company. In 1958 this company's concessions were cancelled and a national oil company was established to handle all operations (drilling, extraction, refining, distribution). The Syrian oilfields were developed with the assistance of the USSR which, from the inception of the Syrian oil industry, played a crucial role in the development of this sector. In 1968 Syria began commercial production and by 1972 it had already begun supplying petroleum to the Soviet Union.

Broadly speaking, Soviet economic aid to Syria was a direct corollary of the general state of the bilateral relationship being essentially motivated by political considerations rather than a desire for direct economic gains. Thus, the 1977 economic deal was aimed at facilitating a Soviet–Syrian reconciliation following their rift over Lebanon. Similarly, the 1979 moratorium signalled a greater Soviet readiness for closer political alignment with Syria which culminated eventually in the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty of 1980.

Moreover, the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty formally upgraded the general pattern of Soviet–Syrian economic relations by stipulating, *inter alia*, for the 'steady consolidation and broadening of the mutually advantageous economic and scientific-technological co-operation and . . . [the broadening] of trade and maritime navigation . . . on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual benefit and the *Most Favoured Nation* (MFN) treatment'.⁸ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the conclusion of the bilateral treaty, which came against the backdrop of a deep crisis in Syria's relations with the West, aroused concern in Western capitals over the future of their economic investments in Syria; this, in turn, drove the Syrians to reassure their trade partners that 'the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the Soviet Union was just a question of mutual security. We are still non-aligned'.⁹

These reassurances proved to be well founded. To be sure, the conclusion of the treaty was followed by intensive economic activity: in 1981 the two countries concluded a five-year trade agreement aimed at increasing bilateral trade by nearly 150 per cent, as well as two agreements on economic aid which provided for the

Table 3.1 Soviet trade with Syria: 1955–85 (million US\$)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Soviet exports</i>	<i>Soviet imports</i>	<i>Soviet trade</i>
1955	0.3	0.0	0.3
1956	1.6	1.6	0.0
1957	4.3	5.4	–1.1
1958	15.2	23.3	–8.1
1959	15.1	6.1	9.0
1960	11.0	7.8	3.2
1961	17.0	4.3	12.7
1962	5.2	6.9	–1.7
1963	13.1	14.2	–1.1
1964	12.2	17.8	–5.6
1965	12.7	18.6	–5.9
1966	22.7	20.3	2.3
1967	34.2	18.2	16.0
1968	42.1	20.9	21.2
1969	47.8	37.3	10.4
1970	46.4	19.2	27.2
1971	57.7	29.3	28.3
1972	71.1	65.2	5.9
1973	97.6	63.2	34.4
1974	92.5	135.0	–42.5
1975	137.5	95.6	41.9
1976	183.7	128.5	55.2
1977	136.8	144.1	–7.3
1978	192.7	108.4	84.3
1979	203.5	100.5	103.1
1980	258.2	236.4	21.9
1981	387.3	349.8	37.6
1982	290.4	414.3	–124.0
1983	275.9	403.6	–127.7
1984	305.5	269.0	36.5
1985	383.6	226.7	156.9

Source: Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR.

development of Syrian infrastructure including the oil industry, irrigation, hydrology, power generation and transportation (railways, shipping). In April 1983 an agreement on the promotion of shipping and maritime cooperation was signed which, in accordance with Article 8 of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, included the reciprocal granting of a Most-Favoured-Nation status. Within a month this agreement was followed by a protocol on cooperation in the field of electrical energy including joint research for the establish-

ment of the first nuclear power station in Syria.¹⁰ Yet this activity augured no major breakthrough in the scope or essence of Soviet–Syrian economic relations; rather, it reflected the persistence of the established pattern of long-term economic and technical agreements which characterize the Soviet–Syrian economic relationship.

Until the 1980s, the Syrian economy under Asad had been largely considered a success story. At this time, however, close observation would have revealed serious breaches in the apparently solid edifice of the Syrian economy: in 1975, for example, the Syrian trade deficit rose by nearly 70 per cent to LSyr 2795 million and between 1975–8 the country's oil exports were stagnant following nearly a decade of continuous growth. These difficulties were compounded both by Syria's military intervention in Lebanon from 1976 onwards, which caused a sharp increase in military expenditure (according to the official data military expenditure grew twofold, from \$450 million in 1974 to more than \$900 during 1976–7) and by the steep decline in Arab economic contributions. In addition, the Lebanese civil war exerted a generally restrictive effect on the Syrian economy including the rising flow of refugees, lost working opportunities for Syrians in Lebanon, the closure of the Beirut port and the stoppage of transshipments from Lebanon. The result of the economic downturn was a tight paring of government budgets with consequent suspension or cancellation of many projects.

The Syrian economy showed a significant upturn during 1978–80 (according to official statistics the GDP grew by 8 per cent in 1978, 3 per cent in 1979 and 8 per cent in 1980), mainly as a result of both the 1978 Baghdad decision to grant Syria annual aid of about \$1.8 million, and the strong rise in international oil prices during 1979–80 which significantly increased Syria's income, despite the declining oil production; however, this recovery soon proved to be short-lived as the early 1980s witnessed a further downtrend in the economy, a clear stagnation if not an absolute decline.

Caused by the factors influencing the economy already in the 1970s (the drop in world oil prices, cutback in Arab financial support due to Syria's support for Iran in the Gulf War, inefficient economic infrastructure), the economic decline in Syria was manifest in many spheres. The balance of payments deteriorated rapidly to a record deficit of \$815 million in 1983 only to be surpassed a year later by a deficit of \$852 million and to reach the alarming figure of \$2 billion in 1985. By 1986, Syria's foreign exchange reserves had fallen down to about \$100 million – equivalent of only two weeks import receipt;

this, in turn, severely constrained Syria's capacity to borrow. Syria's weakened economy was further afflicted by the worsening shortages of raw materials and spare parts, widening unemployment and flight of skilled manpower, especially to the wealthier Arab countries. The regime tried to tackle the growing balance deficit and foreign exchange stringency by imposing severe restrictions on imports, only to be forced to realize the adverse impact of these measures on production and investment. In addition, Syria sought to boost its exports and circumvent a desperate foreign currency shortage by developing an active policy of barter. During 1987, Damascus was flooded by a growing number of representatives from West European and American companies who attempted to set up barter deals which traded such Syrian products as phosphates, canned foods, asphalt, cement, cotton yarn and textiles for much needed pharmaceuticals and spare parts for machinery.

Military spending was least affected by the economic decline thus indicating yet again the subordination of economic considerations to the politico-strategic sphere. In the 1980 budget, defence expenditure doubled as compared with the previous year and in 1983 approximately 54 per cent of Syria's budget was allocated to defence. Increased defence spending (LSyr 12,600 million, or \$3210 million) also dominated the 1984 budget and in 1986 defence still accounted for approximately half of the current expenditure. It was only in late 1986 that Syria's economic predicament came to affect the military sphere, when the reluctant Asad was forced to undertake cutbacks in the standing armed forces thereby making the coveted goal of 'strategic parity' with Israel appear more remote.¹¹

Syria's declining economic position was not overly negative from the Soviet point of view since this development further increased Syria's dependence on the USSR thereby enabling Moscow to employ its leverage over Damascus more effectively than ever before. Thus, not only did the USSR fail to expand its aid programmes to Syria, in order to help this country meet its exacerbating economic needs, but, unlike the 1970s when it had extended several moratoria on Syria's military and economic debts, Chernenko reportedly declined a Syrian request made during Asad's visit to Moscow in October 1984 to reschedule Syria's military debt (estimated at around \$15 billion).¹² Apart from the desire to check the financial costs of Moscow's Middle Eastern involvement, which has gained considerable momentum as a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's effort to restructure the Soviet economy, this policy affords yet another illustration of

the subordinated role of the economic factor in Soviet–Syrian relations. Indeed, it was only after Moscow’s apprehensions of an unwarranted Syrian action had *temporarily* subsided following the cut-backs in Syrian regular forces and the apparent moderation in Syria’s regional policy (e.g. its support for an international conference, *rapprochement* with Jordan, Asad’s meeting with Saddam Hussein, and his attempted mediation between Iran and the Gulf countries), that a more responsive approach towards Damascus’s economic needs could be detected. In late 1986 and 1987, a series of Soviet–Syrian economic agreements were signed. And no less importantly, in acquiescence to Asad’s repeated pleas, made during his visit to Moscow in April 1987, Gorbachev reportedly agreed to reschedule Syria’s military debts.¹³

Broadly speaking, then, the economic field has clearly constituted a secondary facet of the Soviet–Syrian relationship. Unlike its prominence for Soviet politico-strategic interests in the Middle East, Syria has occupied a lesser place from a purely economic point of view, especially when compared with the wealthier Arab oil countries, such as Iraq. Apart from several years in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, when Syria enjoyed generous Arab financial support, Soviet economic interaction with Syria, particularly with regard to the financial terms of arms procurement, has not yielded significant economic returns. Economic relations have been mainly viewed by Moscow as a demonstration of the continuity and closeness of Soviet–Syrian relations. Consequently, as Soviet–Syrian economic relations have been carried out in a highly routinized pattern of long-term agreements and regular interaction through the joint committee on economic, technical and scientific cooperation, they have been less susceptible to changes than the other dimensions of the bilateral relationship.

For Asad the economic sphere has been yet another important component in the overall power base of Syria, a means for ‘mobilizing Syria’s material resources for the defence of the homeland, strengthening the armed forces’ potential and preparing an atmosphere suitable for them to carry out their duty and liberate occupied territory’.¹⁴ Consequently, Moscow’s long-term economic aid has been invaluable for Syria especially in the light of the lenient credit terms of Soviet loans and arms deliveries and the USSR’s readiness for partial conversion of loans into grants.

Part II
The Evolution of Soviet
Policy towards Syria

4 The Formative Years, 1970–73

The autumn of 1970 was an eventful period for Soviet Middle Eastern policy. Within less than two months, both Egypt and Syria, Moscow's two most prominent regional allies, underwent a radical change of leadership, thereby casting a disturbing cloud over the seemingly stable Soviet position in the Middle East. To be sure, neither the death of the Egyptian President, Gamal Abd al-Nasser on 28 September, nor Hafiz Asad's advent to power in Syria two months later took the Soviets by complete surprise. Moscow was fully aware of Nasser's deteriorating health, just as it was mindful of the ongoing power struggle in Damascus between the 'civilian' and 'military' factions of the ruling Ba'th Party (headed respectively by Generals Salah Jadid and Hafiz Asad), which culminated in Asad's seizure of *de facto* control in March 1969. However, given the centrality of friendly Egyptian and Syrian regimes for Moscow's regional standing, the Soviets could not but respond to these developments with considerable alarm.

INTERREGNUM

Since its rise to power in February 1966, the left-wing faction of the Ba'th Party had considerably increased Syria's dependence on the USSR in several fields. In the economic sphere, the Syrian government came to rely almost exclusively on Soviet aid for implementing its various programmes, including the exploitation of Syria's oil resources and the construction of the Euphrates Dam. In the military field, the seriousness of Syria's defeat in the June 1967 War, along with the drying up of Western weapons sources following that war, significantly enhanced the importance of Soviet military aid for the survival of the Ba'th regime. Finally, the USSR utilized both the ideological affinity between the two regimes and Syria's growing hostility towards the West (best illustrated by the severance of diplomatic relations with the major Western powers in the wake of the Six-Day War) in order to develop closer bonds with Damascus. Thus, from the spring of 1966 onwards the Syrian Communist Party,

though remaining officially illegal, was permitted to resume its activities on the Syrian political scene. For example, its leader, Khaled Bakdash was allowed to return to Syria in April 1966 after eight years of exile in Eastern Europe, the communist newspaper *Sawt al-Arab* received permission to be published and a communist was appointed minister of communications.¹

True, the USSR's close relationship with the Ba'th regime was not devoid of frictions and strains. Notwithstanding its heavy dependence on Soviet aid and support, the Syrian leadership remained defiant to Moscow's policy on several major regional issues, most notably on the Arab-Israeli conflict: it rejected the Soviet position that Security Council Resolution 242 be accepted as a basis for an Arab-Israeli settlement, and defied Moscow's attempts to promote a UN-sponsored settlement. And yet, the USSR viewed the relationship in highly positive terms and resented any internal squabbling that might rock the fragile edifice of the Syrian political system. Given Syria's record of political instability, the Soviets feared that any change of leadership in Damascus could only be detrimental to their interests. Such apprehensions were exacerbated by the persistent advocacy of a more independent Syrian foreign policy course by Hafiz Asad, the major contender for leadership.

As early as mid-1966 Asad reportedly reassured the Syrian armed forces that the leftist inclinations of the newly established regime did by no means imply compliance with the Soviet line. Two years later the ambitious minister of defence had already gained control over the military, having removed many of his opponents and pro-Soviet elements from key positions and installed his close friend and ally, General Mustafa Tlas as chief of staff. In September 1968, during the course of the Fourth Regional Congress of the Ba'th Party, Asad managed to remove two major pro-Soviet leaders, Premier Yusuf Zu'ayyin and Foreign Minister Ibrahim Makhous, from their governmental positions, having accused them of complete subservience to Moscow's wishes and of planting local communists in influential positions within the government bureaucracy.²

Against this backdrop, it was hardly surprising that the USSR hurried to the rescue of its supporters within the regime during the power struggle in Damascus in early March 1969. Interrupting a vacation in the USSR, the Soviet ambassador, Nuridin Mukhidinov, rushed back to Damascus, where he reportedly warned Asad that his complete seizure of power might lead to the withdrawal of Soviet aid and experts from Syria.³ The Soviet media, for its part, did not

conceal its resentment of Asad's attempt to alter the existing balance of forces within the Syrian leadership. 'The internal reaction [in Syria] joined hands with imperialist circles, striving to interrupt the process of socialist transformation', wrote *Krasnaya Zvezda* on 6 March, 'to weaken Syria's position in its struggle against the Israeli occupiers, to undermine its international position and its relations with the forces of liberation and with the socialist countries'. And *Pravda* followed suit by calling upon the rival factions to end their dispute since the split within the ranks of the Syrian regime only served the interests of 'imperialism, domestic reaction and the Israeli extremists'.⁴ The Syrian communist party was far more outspoken in its criticism. In two statements issued in early and mid-March, the party condemned the developments in Damascus as endangering the unity of the Syrian progressive forces and warned that 'any failure to settle the crisis in accordance with . . . the framework of the anti-imperialist progressive policy which Syria adopted on 23 February . . . [might] harm the existing relations between Syria and the USSR and other friendly socialist bloc countries . . .'.⁵

Asad responded in kind. In an interview published on 17 March by the British newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, he did not hesitate to put the blame for his country's domestic and external problems on the USSR. In Asad's view, the 'Soviet-inspired, communist-type regime' in Damascus had reduced Syria from the 'granary of the Middle East' to an impoverished country and served to isolate it from its Arab neighbours. The recovery of Syria from this débâcle required the cessation of 'any interference in a country's internal affairs by another country', as well as the reorganization of the Ba'th Party and the purge of 'extreme leftists in ruling positions'. At the time of this interview, anti-communist feelings were mounting in Damascus, accompanied by reported arrests of hundreds of communists and purges of pro-Soviet elements in the military. Yet Asad was very careful not to burn the bridges with Moscow, and during the discussions of the Ba'th congress in March 1969, he took great care to emphasize the importance of strengthening Soviet–Syrian relations, as well as the need for cooperation between the 'progressive forces and other national elements'.⁶

This mixture of relentlessness and pragmatism so characteristic of Asad appears to have convinced the USSR to leave the 'stick' in favour of the 'carrot' and to try to strike a deal with the Syrian minister of defence. On 20 March 1969 Khaled Bakdash was summoned to Moscow, where he was apparently instructed to remain

neutral in the dispute between the two wings of the Ba'th Party. Asad generously reciprocated this Soviet gesture. He reportedly agreed to leave some of his rivals in their positions and to ease the pressure on pro-Soviet elements in Damascus, first and foremost on the Communist Party.⁷

This tacit arrangement was maintained until Asad's complete seizure of power in November 1970. Aware of the precarious position of their close supporters within the Syrian regime, the Soviets took great pains not to antagonize Asad; they refrained from any public criticism of Syria except for the very few occasions where the regime undertook extreme actions against pro-Soviet elements, such as the purge of the communists in the Summer of 1970.⁸ Asad, for his part, still preoccupied with the power struggle against his opponents, was reluctant to risk an open confrontation with Moscow. Indeed, it was the pro-Soviet faction of the Ba'th Party which, through the invasion of Jordan in September 1970 to support the Palestinian struggle against King Hussein, initiated the final trial of strength with Asad that enabled him to assume full control in Damascus.

Asad was adamantly opposed to the Syrian incursion into Jordan. He feared that the Syrian units would be dangerously exposed without air cover, and that the provision of air support would significantly increase the likelihood of an Israeli intervention. The deeper the Syrian forces advanced into Jordan, he reasoned, the more vulnerable they would become to a flank attack from Israel. Hence he would not commit the air force into battle, thus virtually dooming the Syrian campaign.⁹

Asad's well measured restraint during the 1970 crisis proved to be highly beneficial for both his personal standing and Syria's international position. At the cost of a limited loss of face to Damascus, the Syrian minister of defence managed to save his country from a major disaster. For not only was a Syrian escalation bound to trigger a harsh Israeli response, but it would have deepened Syria's isolation in the Arab world, put it on a collision track with the United States and marred its relations with the USSR. On the other hand, the military's irritation with the ill-conceived intervention (to which it had been totally opposed) enabled Asad further to discredit the civil faction of the Ba'th and to take harsh measures against them. These included the purging of 'unreliable' elements within the armed forces, house arrests of some of Jadid's supporters and seizure of full control over the *Sa'iq*a.

President Nur al-Din al-Atasi responded to Asad's challenge by

resigning from office, thus forcing the minister of defence to convene an emergency National Congress of the Ba'ath Party. At the Congress, however, Asad found himself in a marked minority: accused of excessive leniency on the Israeli issue and of gross deviation from the party line, Asad and his major ally, Tlas, were confronted on 12 November with a majority decision to relinquish their army commands and governmental positions. Asad struck back immediately. On the following day he ousted his opponents from the Ba'ath Party and established a provisional Regional Command of the Party consisting of his own supporters. A week later, on 21 November, a new government was formed in which Asad assumed the positions of premier and minister of defence.

Unlike their behaviour eighteen months earlier, this time the Soviets preferred to remain neutral during the final power struggle in Damascus. Well aware of Asad's superior position and convinced of his imminent victory, the USSR saw little point in trying to oppose him and jeopardize future relations with Syria at a time when Soviet–Egyptian relations were entering a period of uncertainty following President Nasser's demise. Another major reason for the Soviet change of heart was their gradual realization during the short *interregnum* from March 1969 to November 1970 that Asad's bite was not as harsh as his bark, and that he was far more pragmatic and less hostile to the USSR than had been previously assumed. In fact, his standing on several key foreign policy issues (e.g. emphasis on the need for improved Syrian relations with the Arab countries) corresponded more to the Soviet position than did the doctrinaire and radical approach of the civil faction, which on several occasions had caused Moscow a good deal of embarrassment. The best example, perhaps, of such community of views was afforded by the September 1970 crisis where Asad and the Soviets saw eye to eye the hazards of the Syrian intervention.

From the Soviet standpoint, the Syrian invasion of Jordan came at a very inopportune moment. By September 1970 the guns along the Suez Canal had just fallen silent following two years of a bitter war of attrition, and the region was bracing itself for a negotiation process under the auspices of the United Nations (the Jarring mission). A new eruption of violence between Israel and Syria around the Jordanian crisis, a foregone conclusion in the Soviet view, could yet again raise the spectre of a direct superpower confrontation. The Soviet fear of a confrontation with the US was further exacerbated by the latter's demonstrated resolve (moving of carriers to the eastern

Mediterranean, placing US forces in Western Germany on alert) to intervene on behalf of King Hussein should the need arise.

Placed between the hammer and the anvil, between the need to preserve its credibility in Syrian eyes and its anxiety to contain the crisis the USSR reacted on two parallel planes. On the one hand, the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron conducted surveillance activities *vis-à-vis* the Sixth Fleet in an attempt to signal to the US that extensive counteraction against Syria would not be tolerated. At the same time the USSR applied heavy pressures on Damascus to withdraw its troops from Jordan, and tried to convince the US administration that it had had nothing to do with the Syrian invasion.¹⁰ Asad's denial of air cover to the invading forces was, therefore, bound to be received by Moscow with a deep sigh of relief.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

Fully aware of his anti-Soviet reputation, Asad made it one of his immediate goals following his accession to power to reassure the USSR of Syria's future course. As well as including two communists in the new government, the newly established Provisional Regional Command of the Ba'th Party released a statement announcing its continued adherence to the guidelines set by 'the Party's congresses and theories', and its intention to 'develop relations with the socialist camp, particularly with the friendly USSR'.¹¹

The Soviets responded very favourably to the signals coming from Damascus. 'All the imperialists' machinations against the Syrian people have failed', Radio Moscow noted with undisguised satisfaction a few days after Asad's final victory, since the Syrian leaders, 'in spite of the differences between them', were determined to continue their country's 'policy of reforms', and to cooperate 'with the friendly socialist countries, including the Soviet Union'.¹² On 30 November *Pravda* approved the change of regime in Damascus and two days later both President Ahmed Hatib and Premier Asad were congratulated by their Soviet counterparts on their appointments. Moscow also had only praise for the Syrian intention to accede to the newly established federation between Egypt, Libya and the Sudan.

Three months later, in February 1971, another move was made to consolidate Soviet-Syrian relations when Asad made his first official visit to the USSR as head of state. Despite the surfacing of certain differences, in particular Syria's rejection of Security Council Resol-

ution 242 as a basis for an Arab–Israeli settlement, the two parties had good reasons to consider the visit a success. The establishment of personal relations between the two leaderships served to defuse mutual wariness and distrust and set the tone for future relations. Having heard Asad’s reasons for removing his rivals from the Ba’th leadership and his determination to deepen Syrian–Soviet relations, the Soviets were further assured of Syria’s course. They were also relieved to hear from Asad that he would not try to undermine the Jarring mission.

Asad, for his part, managed to gain Soviet approval for his domestic and foreign policies, and more importantly, unequivocal legitimization of his regime. Furthermore, the discussions produced concrete results including an agreement on economic and technical cooperation as well as a limited arms deal.

All in all, then, the visit completely dispelled any remaining hopes in the West of a reversal in Syria’s foreign policy orientation. Rather, it underlined the two parties’ keen interest in continuing their special relationship and opened an era of close Soviet–Syrian cooperation which was to last – though not without occasional differences – until the outbreak of the October 1973 War.¹³

Already in 1971, the volume of Soviet and East European economic activity in Syria, as well as the scope of bilateral exchanges of delegations, grew significantly; the spring and the summer of 1971 also witnessed the beginning of a steady flow of Soviet arms to Syria. By that time, Asad had already absolved Moscow of any interference in Syria’s domestic affairs and the Syrian media was referring to the USSR as ‘our loyal friend, rendering us all-round active support’.¹⁴ The Soviets, for their part, did not restrain their praise of the Syrian regime. ‘The Syrian people are firmly advancing along the road of economic independence and social progress’ wrote *Pravda* on 22 May 1971, while the Soviet News Agency, TASS, expressed in the same month the CPSU’s ‘high assessment’ of ‘the deep social and economic transformation of the Syrian society’ implemented under the leadership of the Ba’th Party.¹⁵ Moscow’s increased confidence in Asad was also illustrated by its pressure on the Syrian communists to collaborate with the newly-established regime.

In his report to the 24th CPSU Congress on 30 March 1971, Leonid Brezhnev put Syria on par with Egypt, which at that time still ranked as the USSR’s most prominent Third World ally: he praised the ‘important land reforms’ carried out in Syria and Egypt, noted the crucial Soviet support for the ‘restoration of the defence potential’ of

both countries following the 1967 War, and reviewed with undisguised satisfaction the growing bilateral cooperation with each of these two countries.¹⁶

As things turned out, Brezhnev's prognosis proved to be lasting only with regard to Syria. Notwithstanding the conclusion of a Soviet–Egyptian Friendship and Cooperation Treaty on 27 May 1971, the USSR was unable to prevent the evolution of serious disagreements with President Anwar Sadat. In early May 1971, Sadat removed Moscow's staunchest supporter within the Egyptian leadership, Ali Sabri, from his position as the secretary-general of the Arab Socialist Union, eventually bringing him and his followers to trial on charges of conspiring against the state. Two months later, in mid-July 1971, Sadat acted against the Soviet interests by helping Sudan's president, Ja'far Numeiri, to quell an attempted communist coup. Moscow responded to the Egyptian move by slowing down arms shipments to Egypt.¹⁷

DECOUPLING EGYPT AND SYRIA

While Soviet–Egyptian relations were facing their first signs of serious strain, Soviet relations with Syria were gaining considerable momentum. In July 1972 an agreement on Soviet economic and technical support to Syria was signed, to be followed three months later by an arms deal signed during a visit to Damascus by the Soviet minister of defence, Andrei Grechko. Soviet–Syrian military relations were significantly upgraded later in the year following the conclusion of two additional arms deals: a \$700 million deal signed during Asad's second visit to Moscow, on 5–8 July 1972, and a follow-up agreement concluded during a Moscow visit in December by the Syrian minister of defence, Mustafa Tlas.¹⁸ Soviet–Syrian military cooperation continued apace throughout 1973 and was highlighted by the exchange of several high-ranking delegations: in February, the commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Admiral Victor Sysoyev, visited Syria and conferred with Tlas and Asad; three months later, the Soviet air force commander, Marshal Pavel Kutakhov arrived for a four-day working visit; in late June 1973 Tlas paid yet another visit to the USSR.¹⁹

Coming at a time when the USSR was using delaying tactics in its arms deliveries to Egypt in order to prevent war, the growing Soviet military support to Syria seems, on the face of it, inexplicable. After

all, it was Sadat, rather than Asad, who accepted United Nations Resolution 242 and who participated in the Jarring peace initiative; it was Sadat who institutionalized his country's relations with the USSR in the form of a bilateral treaty, whereas Asad remained resistant to repeated Soviet pleas to sign such an agreement. Moreover, Sadat's decision to abandon the search for a political solution in favour of the military option did not essentially differ from Asad's position at the time, which rejected a peaceful settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict. If the Soviets were opposed to the outbreak of another war in the Middle East, as indeed they were, why did they not stop supplying Asad, the most outspoken proponent of the military option? Above all, since the Syrian and Egyptian armed forces had been unified – at least theoretically – after the formation of the Egyptian–Syrian–Libyan federation in April 1971, any increase in Syria's military potential could (theoretically) enhance Egypt's power and, in consequence, its inclination to launch war.

This apparent contradiction in Soviet behaviour appears to have derived from four interconnected considerations. In the first place, the USSR believed, and not unjustifiably, that despite Asad's vocal advocacy of the military option, he would not go to war without Egypt, whereas Sadat, on the other hand, was ready to launch war on his own should the need arise. Hence, since the USSR viewed the decision on war to be essentially an Egyptian one, it focused its pressures upon Cairo and refrained from translating its fundamental differences with Syria into military sanctions.²⁰ Second, despite the formal unification of the Syrian and Egyptian commands, it was only in April 1973 that Syria joined the projected Egyptian campaign.²¹ Third, the two countries had different security requirements. Egypt had the advantage of a tranquil border with Israel in the wake of the ceasefire agreement of August 1970, whereas the ongoing low-intensity hostilities between Israel and Syria considerably increased the latter's need for military support. This state of affairs enabled the USSR to distinguish between its military aid to Syria and that of Egypt. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the intensification of Soviet–Syrian relations from 1971 onwards reflected Moscow's awareness of its precarious position in Egypt and its intention to prepare an alternative ally, however partial, to Egypt. This intention gained momentum after the expulsion of about 15,000 Soviet military personnel from Egypt in July 1972.²²

The decoupling of Soviet policy towards Syria and Egypt was generously rewarded by Damascus, as Asad proved very receptive to

the USSR and its interests. Not only did he refrain from exploiting the deterioration in Soviet–Egyptian relations in order to extract benefits from the USSR, but he toiled to mend the rift between Moscow and Cairo. Already during the Sudan crisis of 1971 the Syrian president did not hesitate to side with Moscow: he dismissed out of hand any Soviet involvement in the failed coup in Khartoum and dispatched the Syrian vice-president, Mahmoud al-Ayubi, and Foreign Minister Khaddam to Moscow to mediate a compromise between the parties.²³

A year later, on the way home from his July 1972 visit to the USSR, Asad stopped in Cairo, where he questioned the prudence of Sadat's decision. In the following months, Asad was reported to have conveyed messages between Egypt and the USSR in an attempt to smooth over differences between the two countries, and in late September he paid a two-day unofficial visit to Moscow which apparently led to the return of the Soviet and Egyptian ambassadors to their respective capitals after an absence of two months.²⁴

Nor did Asad conceal his dissatisfaction with the expulsion of Soviet troops from Egypt; while avoiding direct criticism of Sadat, he left little doubt on where Syria stood *vis-à-vis* the Egyptian move. Calling for an 'open dialogue' with 'our Soviet friends' *al-Thawra* argued that the lack of close Arab–Soviet consultations could only turn secondary contradictions into major problems.²⁵ *Al-Ba'th* was more pointed in its criticism, arguing on 24 August that due to the wrong assumption 'that the United States could miraculously move strategically from the hostile to the friendly trench', some circles had 'forcibly squeezed the friend into the hostile camp'. This 'vibration in vision' and 'distortion of the basic facts of the Arab struggle', cautioned *al-Ba'th*, 'had caused dizziness to our masses' and had only aided the American position. And by way of dispelling the widespread wave of speculation that Syria was going to follow the Egyptian example, Asad clarified that it was in 'the interest of the Syrian Arab People to continue to benefit from the Soviet experts . . . who have been working seriously and actively [in Syria] for a long time'.²⁶

But the most striking illustration of Syrian responsiveness to Soviet Middle Eastern interests was afforded in May 1973 when, as noted in Chapter 1, Asad succeeded in persuading Sadat not to go to war before the convening of the Brezhnev–Nixon summit in June.

Interestingly enough, Asad's deep frustration over the Soviet failure to advance the Arab cause in the summit, and his consequent decision to go to war in October, did not shake the overall edifice of

Soviet–Syrian relations. As long as Soviet military equipment kept on pouring into Syria, Asad did not see much point in clashing with the USSR. The Soviets, for their part, aware of no more than the general Arab intention to launch war on the earliest possible occasion (Sadat informed the Soviet ambassador of the impending attack on 3 October and Asad followed suit a day later), and in the light of their shaky position in Egypt, were less than enthusiastic to jeopardize their relationship with Syria. Accordingly, apart from the above-mentioned harsh criticism of the superpower summit by the Syrian press and unconfirmed reports of restrictions on the activities of Soviet advisers deployed within the Syrian armed forces, Soviet–Syrian relations continued unhindered, with the two parties taking much care to underline the close relationship between them. In an interview with the Syrian newspaper *al-Thawra* on 11 September, Asad dismissed the notion of a US–Soviet ‘collusion’ at the expense of the Arabs, arguing that the USSR, ‘which has been and remains our friend in supporting our struggle and helping our efforts in the various fields . . . will never accept any bargaining with the rights and interests of our people or the other peoples’. Echoing this motive on 4 October, 48 hours before the outbreak of the October War, *al-Thawra* highly praised the USSR for its policy of friendship towards Syria.

5 War and Disengagement

WAR

To the USSR, the 1973 October War was the wrong war at the wrong time, for several reasons. Highly sceptical of the Arabs' ability to wage a successful campaign, the Soviets feared that a Middle Eastern war would end in yet another Arab calamity which, in turn, might hamper the course of *détente*, to which the USSR was then committed, tarnish the prestige of Soviet weaponry, and lead the USSR's Arab allies to conclude that the road to regaining their lost territories passed through the United States – the only power capable of forcing concessions on Israel.¹

Hence, not only did the USSR try to prevent the outbreak of hostilities, but it also sought to contain the war at its various stages; this anxiety to terminate hostilities was, however, bound to antagonize Moscow's two Arab allies.

The Soviet clash with Egypt over the ceasefire issue took place within a few hours of the outbreak of hostilities, when the Soviet ambassador to Egypt, Sergei Vinogradov, pressed Sadat to accept what he claimed to be a Syrian-proposed ceasefire. Interpreting this request as a sign of Soviet no-confidence in Egypt's military capability, the offended Sadat immediately contacted the Syrian president for an explanation, and, once reassured that Asad had nothing to do with the Soviet initiative, declined the Soviet request. Sadat's harsh reaction, however, failed to impress Vinogradov who approached him a day later with the same suggestion, only to be turned down for the second time.²

Two years later, when Egypt's relations with both the USSR and Syria were at a low ebb, Sadat changed his version and accused the two countries (rather than the USSR alone) of colluding to end the war in its initial phase. According to Sadat, a short while before the war Asad asked the USSR to put forward a ceasefire proposal once hostilities broke out, and Moscow complied with the Syrian request.

Notwithstanding Sadat's unbridled animosity towards the USSR, his accusation seems plausible, given the fact that both the USSR and Syria had good reasons to cooperate in such a venture. An early bid for a ceasefire coincided with the Soviet staunch opposition to the

war. It could have left the USSR's Arab allies with some tangible gains, might have triggered a process of Arab-Israeli negotiations, and, perhaps more importantly, could have prevented the conflict from escalating. For Syria, an early termination of hostilities meant the retention of its territorial exploits, whereas the continuation of the war might have forfeited them.³

Having failed to stop the war at its initial stage, and unable to remain aloof in the conflict, the Soviets decided to nail their colours to the uncertain mast of the Arab campaign: by 7 October the first Soviet ships carrying arms had already departed the Black Sea ports on their way to Syria and Egypt. Simultaneously, and probably in order to enable the Arabs to consolidate their early gains, the USSR failed to cooperate with the United States in arranging an urgent meeting of the Security Council. Yet, the Soviets were reluctant to antagonize the US administration and sought to preserve an air of goodwill with the other superpower. Already on 7 October Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon reassured each other of their determination not to let the war undermine Soviet-American *détente*, and direct contacts between the two leaderships continued throughout the war.⁴

This relative Soviet success of playing to both hands proved to be very short-lived, as the course of hostilities renewed Moscow's anxiety to terminate the war at the earliest possible occasion. By 10 October Syrian forces had already been expelled from the Golan Heights, and three days later Israel began advancing towards Damascus. On the southern front, having repulsed a large-scale Egyptian armoured offensive on 14 October, destroying some 500 tanks while losing less than 30 of its own, Israel managed to drive a wedge through the Egyptian lines, construct bridges and transfer large forces to the west bank of the Suez Canal. By 18 October, three Israeli armoured divisions had crossed the canal and commenced a two-pronged drive to surround the Egyptian armies and cut off the Cairo-Ismailia road to the north and the Cairo-Suez road to the south.

Faced with this adverse development, the Soviets intensified both their military support for the Arab war effort, and their collaboration with the US administration in engineering a ceasefire. On 16 October the Soviet premier, Alexei Kosygin, arrived in Cairo for a three-day visit, during which he apparently managed to extract Anwar Sadat's consent for a ceasefire bid.⁵ At this point the Soviets extended an urgent invitation to the US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, to come to Moscow. Kissinger arrived on 20 October and a day later the

two parties worked out a joint ceasefire resolution, which was approved on 22 October by a special session of the Security Council as Resolution 338.⁶

Asad did not welcome the ceasefire resolution as it ran counter to a variety of Syrian interests. For one thing, Syria's complete exclusion from the US-Soviet negotiations on the ceasefire agreement was perceived by Asad as a personal and national humiliation.⁷ Also, since Israel's major effort at the time was directed against Egypt, Asad did not have any sense of urgency about the need for a ceasefire. Instead he apparently sought to exploit this favourable conjuncture in order to launch a counter-attack with Iraq.⁸ Moreover, the cessation of hostilities on 22 October would have saved the Egyptian Third Army, deployed on the eastern side of the Suez Canal, thereby leaving Egypt with some visible territorial gains. Such an eventuality would only have highlighted Syria's failure to achieve similar successes and, as a consequence, might have eroded Asad's domestic power base. Finally, the ceasefire resolution was based on Security Council Resolution 242 to which Syria, at the time, was adamantly opposed; its acceptance, therefore, could be interpreted as a sign of weakness on Asad's part. Given these clear disadvantages, it was only natural that Asad chose to ignore the ceasefire resolution completely. It took two more days of fighting and another Security Council Resolution, Resolution 339, to convince him to halt fire and accept Resolutions 338 and 339.

GENEVA

Fully aware of the potential adverse implications of his acceptance of Resolution 338, especially since this move was not matched by any territorial gains, Asad was quick to offer a public explanation for his decision. In an Address to the Nation on 29 October, he criticized the USSR (albeit indirectly) for keeping Syria in the dark about the superpower negotiations on a ceasefire, arguing that the ceasefire resolution could not have come at a more inopportune time from the Syrian point of view. Yet he maintained that despite the exclusion of Damascus from the negotiations on a ceasefire, it was only due to the Syrian 'steadfastness' that the UN Resolution had come to contain any positive advances for the Arab cause. For, unlike the 1967 War, which ended with a 'brief appeal for a ceasefire', Resolution 338 'embodied a comprehensive concept' for a Middle Eastern settle-

ment, based on UN Resolution 242 which, in Asad's view, meant a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and the satisfaction of the *full* national rights of the Palestinian people.

Accordingly, argued Asad, the Arab struggle entered the political stage. However, this change in strategy did not imply the renunciation of the Arab goals, for 'just as there is no place for hesitation in military battles, there is absolutely no room for it in political battles'. In any event, 'if our struggle at the present stage does not achieve our just aspirations – a matter we have taken into account and a possibility we do not exclude – we shall return to the armed struggle . . . until we achieve our aim'.⁹

Moscow responded very favourably to the (reluctant) Syrian acceptance of Resolution 338. The Soviets were eager to establish an Arab–Israeli settlement through an international peace conference that would be held under the auspices of the United Nations and co-chaired by the two superpowers. They therefore ignored the angry words accompanying the Syrian ceasefire decision and interpreted Asad's recognition of Resolution 242, however qualified, as implying Syria's possible participation in such a conference. On 22 November TASS noted that Syria had decided to attend the peace conference, due to convene in Geneva in December, and *Trud* carried a similar report a day later.¹⁰

The Soviet optimism proved to be too premature. Throughout November and December 1973 the Syrian leadership was torn by a heated debate on the Geneva conference, in which a moderate faction (headed by Vice-President Mahmoud al-Ayubi and Assistant Secretary of the Regional Command, Abdallah al-Ahmar) supported Syria's participation in the international conference, whereas another group (whose most outspoken representative was the Syrian foreign minister, Abd al-Khalim Khaddam) vehemently opposed this idea.¹¹ While sharing the fear of a separate Egyptian–Israeli deal that would present Syria with a *fait accompli*, the two factions differed in their assessment of the adequate means to obstruct such an eventuality: the moderates believed that the issue could be better handled inside the conference, while the hardliners argued that Syria should not participate before receiving guarantees for a complete Israeli withdrawal.

As the scheduled opening of the conference drew closer, the scales appeared to be tilting in the hardliners' favour. In an interview with the Yugoslav news agency, *Tanjug*, on 8 November, Khaddam unequivocally rebuffed direct negotiations with Israel before the settlement of

'all vital questions'. In his view, anything short of a complete removal of the potential obstacles facing the conference would play into Israel's hands and would enable it to 'dictate the tone of negotiations'. Three days later, during a meeting with a French parliamentary delegation in Damascus, the Syrian foreign minister sought to undermine the Geneva conference by stating that Syria considered European and African co-sponsorship of the conference as a *sine qua non* for its participation.¹² Similar statements continued well into December.¹³

This hardening of the Syrian position did not evade Soviet eyes. Indeed, throughout November and December the USSR went to great lengths to convince Damascus of the importance of the political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict by means of an international conference. Enunciated by Brezhnev in person already on 26 October 1973 and reiterated by other prominent figures,¹⁴ the main Soviet argument was that as a result of several factors, such as increased Soviet-American cooperation, Arab unity, and the destruction of the myth of Israel's military superiority, the 'current political atmosphere was more suitable than at any other time for the establishment of justice and peace in the Middle East';¹⁵ any failure to exploit this favourable conjuncture to its fullest would, therefore, be a historical mistake.

As late as 17 December, four days before the convening of the Geneva conference, the Soviet media reported Syria's readiness to participate in the international conference, and emphasized the latter's conditions for participating – guaranteed Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories.¹⁶ Given the USSR's awareness that the Syrian demand was unacceptable to both the United States and Israel, and in view of the fact that on 15 December Asad met Kissinger in Damascus and informed him that Syria would not come to Geneva,¹⁷ the Soviet decision to underscore Asad's conditions apparently reflected a last-ditch attempt to bring Syria along to the conference. By emphasizing the demand for a complete Israeli withdrawal, Moscow ostensibly sought to reassure Damascus of its prospective support for this position at the conference; by publicizing Asad's willingness to participate in the conference, on the other hand, the Soviets tried to portray the Syrian leader in moderate terms, so as to put the blame for Syrian non-participation, should it happen, on Israel's intransigence. But whatever the reasons for Moscow's last-minute references, they were of no avail: on 18 De-

cember Damascus officially announced its decision not to participate in the Geneva conference.

Dismayed as they were with the Syrian decision, the Soviets did not pressure Asad to reconsider his position. After all, for the Soviets the convening of the Geneva conference was a major achievement in its own right. Moreover, because it was reluctant to risk a confrontation with Damascus at the time when Egypt was drifting into the Western orbit, Moscow chose to put the blame for the Syrian absence on Israel's 'tactics of procrastination'.¹⁸ According to the Soviets, Syria's non-participation in Geneva was motivated neither by the country's opposition to the holding of the conference nor by its rejection of a political settlement; rather it reflected Syria's reluctance to play into Israel's hands.

Moscow's attempts to downplay its differences with Damascus notwithstanding, the disagreements between the two countries resurfaced within a short while after the ending of the Geneva conference. Commenting on the proceedings of the conference, Khaddam noted dryly that 'Syria had not waged the October Battle and sacrificed its best sons in order to achieve Zionist aims'. In his view the Geneva process, in the absence of a definite timetable, would drag on indefinitely, thus enabling Israel to 'entrench its occupation by establishing new settlements and destroying the pro-Arab international solidarity which began evolving during the last war'.¹⁹ The Syrian media was even more outspoken: 'The transformation of the Geneva conference into a meeting for taking pictures and delivering political speeches', wrote *al-Thawra* on 22 December, 'is neither the way to peace nor to the solution of the Middle East problem'. In its view, the discussions in Geneva were merely the continuation of the Kilometre 101 talks on disengagement of forces between Israel and Egypt (which took place in the immediate wake of the October War), and just as Israel had 'blown up the tent and destroyed its agreement', the 'Geneva tent' was most likely to be blown up, too. In these circumstances, threatened *al-Thawra*, 'the ceasefire cannot continue. The Golan territory is solid and the spears in it are too difficult to break or pull out. The entire world knows that the Arab spears are still hoisted in the Golan'.

This grim assessment of the political process was diametrically opposed to Moscow's optimistic portrayal of the Geneva conference. Viewing the conference as an 'important stage on the road to a just settlement',²⁰ the Soviets were determined to keep the Geneva

process going until its fruition in a political settlement. Hence, they went to great lengths to emphasize that the adjournment of the conference after merely two days of discussions did not imply the collapse of the peace process. On the contrary, with the formation of the political and military working groups, 'the Geneva conference has moved into a phase of discussing in detail practical measures aimed at a political settlement in the Middle East'; and once these commissions had completed their work and submitted their recommendations, the Geneva plenum would be reconvened, probably in January 1974.²¹

Given this wide gap between the Soviet and Syrian positions, a confrontation between the two seemed a matter of time.

DISENGAGEMENT

Since the Soviets viewed the disengagement of forces 'in the areas where hostilities took place'²² as a means to reactivate the Geneva process, they did not attempt to obstruct the Egyptian-Israeli talks on this issue. Instead they sought to bring Syria into the process by pressuring it to provide Israel with a list of prisoners of war, which would pave the way for Syrian-Israeli talks on disengagement under the auspices of the Geneva conference.²³

The Soviet restraint was rewarded by the Americans. While already entrenched in the belief that 'the prerequisite of effective Middle East diplomacy was to reduce the Soviet influence',²⁴ Kissinger proved willing to attribute to the Soviets an important role in the evolving political process. In a press conference on 22 January, four days after the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement, the US Secretary of State praised the Soviet role in the convening of the Geneva conference, and argued that the disengagement talks did not contradict the spirit of Geneva. This was because the two superpowers had agreed in advance that there was no need for co-chairing these talks, and the USSR was kept informed on the progression of the discussions and gave its backing to them.²⁵

Whether or not the Soviets accepted Kissinger's explanation, they certainly capitalized on his version in order to draw attention to their critical involvement in the engineering of the Egyptian-Israeli accord through the 'close coordination of the actions of the USSR and Egypt at all stages . . . including the work of the Near East Peace Conference and the working groups that come out of it'.²⁶

Yet despite Moscow's recognition of the significance of the disengagement agreement and its attempts to take some of the credit for its attainment, its fear of being excluded from future Arab-Israeli negotiations drove it to intensify the efforts to reconvene Geneva. 'The agreement between Egypt and Israel on the disengagement of troops, reached at the beginning of the Geneva peace conference is a positive step', stated Brezhnev on 29 January, 'but of course things must not stop here. The Geneva conference must carry out its main mission: achieve a basic political settlement, and establish a lasting peace in the Middle East'.²⁷ Because they were well aware that the road to Geneva passed largely through Damascus, the Soviets did not delay in renewing their efforts to bring Syria into the international conference.

In addition to a slowdown in arms shipments to Syria,²⁸ the Soviet influence attempts were reinforced, on 30 January, by an article in *Pravda* signed by 'Observer' – a pseudonym usually recognized as representing the policy positions of the Politburo. The article criticized Syria indirectly for its absence from Geneva and urged it to follow the Egyptian example. It argued further that 'the question of the return of Syrian territories is just as acute as the question of the return of all the Arab lands occupied by Israel. The problem of the disengagement of troops as the first step to resolve the question of the return of these territories also directly concerns Syria'. Any failure to move in this direction would therefore play into the hands of Israel and the 'imperialist reaction' which 'were persistently pursuing a line of weakening the unity of the Arab countries'.

As in late 1973, the Soviet pressures on Syria to come to Geneva coincided with yet another internal debate in Damascus on Syria's future course. Whereas the hardliners entrenched their demand for a full Israeli withdrawal as a prerequisite for Syrian entry into any negotiations, the moderates not only preached the necessity for an immediate embarkment on a political process, but reportedly presented an operational plan for the talks which comprised three major elements: an Israeli withdrawal from Syrian territories occupied in the October War; the withdrawal of Israeli troops to areas in the Golan Heights adjacent to Israel, and their replacement by a United Nations peacekeeping force, and, the establishment of a Palestinian political entity in the West Bank.²⁹

That this time the scales were tipping in favour of the moderates was evidenced by a series of statements made by Abd al-Khalim Khaddam, perhaps the foremost hawk, which indicated that Syria

would agree to negotiate a disengagement agreement with Israel as a first step for a complete Israeli withdrawal. To justify this policy change Khaddam argued that since Syria and Egypt were in agreement about the preliminary nature of the disengagement talks, the separation of forces should be implemented simultaneously on the two fronts.³⁰ In mid-February Asad reinforced this position by announcing his willingness to submit the long-sought list of Israeli prisoners of war, and thereby, removing the last obstacle on the road to a Syrian-Israeli dialogue.³¹

The substance of the evolving change in Syrian policy fully coincided with the Soviet approach: by defining disengagement of forces as merely an initial step on the road to a comprehensive settlement, Damascus apparently rejected Kissinger's 'step-by-step' strategy and adopted the Soviet advocacy of an overall thrust towards a comprehensive settlement.³² The form assumed by the Syrian policy, on the other hand, was far more disturbing from Moscow's point of view. For, instead of accepting Geneva as the framework for working out a disengagement agreement, Syria appeared to be following the Egyptian example by heading towards a US-sponsored deal.

In these circumstances Moscow adopted a two-pronged strategy aimed, on the one hand, at convincing the United States and Syria on the merits of Geneva, while, on the other, seeking to drive a wedge in the evolving dialogue between Washington and Damascus by noting the 'one-sidedness and self-interested' nature of US Middle Eastern policy. 'The United States could have played a more effective and substantial role in solving the Middle East crisis had it exerted pressure on Israel to make it carry out the well-known UN resolutions, which serve as the only means of solving the crisis', argued *Radio Moscow* on 20 February, 'but recent developments lead one to conclude that Washington is not so much interested in this aspect as in exploiting its mediation in a Middle East settlement to influence the attitude of the Arabs, so as to make them lift the oil embargo, to benumb their vigilance, to mislead them, and to split the issue of the liberation of the occupied Arab territories'.

The Soviets argued to no avail. Determined to exploit Syria's temporary rise to the fore of the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to attain some concrete territorial gains, Asad was deterred neither from keeping the Soviets in the dark regarding his future intentions, nor from embarrassing them publicly by granting the United States a major political prize: the long-awaited list of Israeli prisoners of war.

Moreover, in order to consolidate Syria's position during the impending negotiations process, on 5 February 1974 Asad launched a war of attrition against Israel on the Golan Heights.

The Syrian behaviour faced the Soviets once again with the spectre of exclusion from the political process and forced them to move quickly. In two visits to Damascus – on 27–28 February and 4–7 March 1974 – the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, tried to highlight to the Syrian leadership the importance of cooperation with the USSR. He stressed that any agreement accomplished unilaterally by the United States was doomed to fail; it was in Syria's best interest, therefore, to strive for an accord worked out jointly and guaranteed by both superpowers within the framework of the Geneva conference. Gromyko's arguments, however, fell on deaf ears. Not only did the Syrians reject his suggestion to reconvene the Geneva plenum,³³ but he found himself accommodating their position on several issues. While emphasizing the importance of Soviet participation in the Middle East peace process 'at all stages', as well as the 'usefulness of regular [bilateral] contacts at all levels', the joint communiqué issued at the end of Gromyko's second visit (7 March) carried no mention of the Geneva conference. Another important Soviet gesture towards Damascus was the inclusion in the communiqué of the frequent Syrian demand, which the USSR had dropped already in the late 1960s, for a 'specific timetable' for the complete Israeli withdrawal, as well as the pledge to continue 'all-round support' to Syria, particularly in the economic and military fields. Finally, the communiqué carried a reference to Syria's 'legitimate, inalienable right to use all *effective means* for the liberation of its occupied lands'.³⁴

The first expression of Soviet support for the Syrian war of attrition, the communiqué reflected Moscow's worsening plight in the Middle East. True, it has been argued that the Syrians would not have launched their war of attrition without receiving a 'green light' from Moscow;³⁵ however, even a cursory examination of the Soviet public references to the renewed Syrian–Israeli hostilities would reveal the USSR's deep concern over the possibility of yet another general conflagration in the Middle East. With Israeli forces merely forty kilometres from Damascus and the Syrian capital well within the effective range of the Israeli artillery, and with Egypt distancing itself from the circle of war, the Soviets had no illusions regarding the ability of the debilitated Syrian army to withstand the Israeli military pressure, a mission that had been beyond its means during the

October War. In their judgement, therefore, the war of attrition could well lead to the collapse of the Syrian armed forces which, in turn, would raise the pressure for Soviet intervention with all its attendant international ramifications. In short, in return for backing a hazardous foreign policy course the USSR received no more than vague assurances for future coordination.

While the decision to support the war of attrition publicly may be important in its own right, it was merely the first harbinger in a long series of Soviet gestures to Syria. Against the backdrop of intensifying Syrian-American contacts and a rapid deterioration in Soviet-Egyptian relations, the USSR was willing to pay a higher price for Damascus's friendship: as noted in Chapter 3, already during his visit to Damascus Gromyko was reported to have offered the Syrians \$2.2 billion to cover the economic damage suffered at the October War.³⁶ Within a fortnight of the visit the arms embargo on Syria was lifted, and in mid-April, during an official visit by President Asad to Moscow, the two countries concluded a whole host of bilateral agreements in several fields: from inter-party relations through cultural and technical cooperation to trade exchange. Most important were the signing of a long-term economic agreement (which reportedly stipulated, among other things, a twelve-year moratorium on Syria's military debt)³⁷ and the conclusion of a large-scale arms deal providing for the delivery of some hundred tanks (most of them T-62s) and surface-to-air missiles, as well as some major weapons systems, such a SCUD-B surface-to-surface missiles and MiG-23 aircraft, which until then had not been supplied to Syria.³⁸

Interestingly, despite his unquestioned eagerness to placate Syria, Brezhnev was not deterred from using Asad's visit to criticize, albeit indirectly, certain aspects of Syria's foreign policy. Thus, the Soviet leader sought to remind Asad of his commitment to a comprehensive settlement by launching a harsh attack on the American attempts to 'replace overall settlement with "partial" agreements of different kind'. Similarly, in his delineation of the main components of a Middle East peace settlement, Brezhnev laid special emphasis on the need to ensure 'the security and sovereignty of all the states of the area', thus signalling to the Syrians (probably in the light of Asad's declaration on 8 March 1974 that Palestine was a 'basic part of southern Syria'),³⁹ that Israel's existence was a given, as far as the USSR was concerned. Finally, Brezhnev referred in his speech neither to the Syrian right to use 'all effective means' in liberating its

occupied territories, nor to the need for a timetable for an Israeli withdrawal, thereby illustrating the half-hearted nature of Soviet support for Syria over these issues.⁴⁰

Brezhnev's criticism of Syria notwithstanding, the overall atmosphere of the visit was extremely positive. In an exceptional gesture to the Syrian President, the entire Soviet leadership (Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgorny) received Asad at the airport upon his arrival, while the Soviet media went out of their way to portray the visit as a demonstration of unity.⁴¹ The joint communiqué at the close of the visit was equally high spirited, emphasizing both the consensus between the two parties and the strength of Soviet support for Syria. Modelled after its March predecessor, the communiqué rejected the notion of partial settlements, affirmed the importance of Soviet participation in all stages of the peace process, reiterated mutual agreement to 'continue regular bilateral consultations on pressing international problems', and reconfirmed the USSR's pledge to consolidate Syria's 'defence capacity, and its lawful, inalienable right to use all effective means for liberating its occupied territories'.⁴²

Together with the bilateral agreements mentioned above, the communiqué confirmed the success of Asad's visit by shoring the Soviet position along the Syrian line and ensuring generous rewards for Damascus's readiness to keep its relations with Moscow intact. The Soviet balance sheet was more equivocal but still rather satisfactory. True, neither the emphasis laid by Asad on the importance of Soviet participation in the negotiations nor his promise of regular consultations with the USSR was of any practical value, since Syria (and the United States) had no intention of allowing Moscow to play a real role in the final stage of the negotiations, begun in May 1974. Yet in contrast with the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement talks where the US paid the obligatory lip-service to the Soviets only after the attainment of the agreement, both Damascus and Washington were prepared to give the Soviets an appearance of real participation in the actual negotiations process. Thus, in several meetings with his Soviet counterpart, Kissinger promised to maintain 'close contact' with the Soviet Union, so as 'to strive to coordinate their efforts for a peaceful settlement in the region'.⁴³ Similarly, the decision to have a disengagement agreement signed in Geneva constituted a clear American, and much more so Syrian, gesture to the Soviet Union. Finally, a joint Soviet-Syrian statement issued on 29 May, at the end of Gromyko's visit to Damascus and a few hours before the announcement of the Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement, emphasized

the importance of Soviet participation in every stage of a political settlement, reiterated the Soviet view that a separation of forces was merely 'a first step and an indivisible part of the comprehensive solution', and stressed the urgency of continuing the quest for an overall settlement.⁴⁴

However forthcoming towards Moscow, these shows of goodwill were a matter of form rather than substance. In effect, the Soviets were neither consulted nor informed during the final round of Kissinger's 'shuttle diplomacy': by the time that Western reports were already heralding the impending Syrian-Israeli agreement, the Soviet media were still cautioning against Israeli obstructionism.⁴⁵ Yet these gestures appear to have satisfied the Soviets, as they served to reassure them about Syrian intentions, thereby reducing their incentive to clash with Syria or the United States, which linked Soviet acquiescence in its Middle Eastern initiative with the entire structure of *détente*. Therefore, instead of trying to undermine Kissinger's mediation efforts, or even to play an active role in the final stage of the negotiations, the Soviets preferred to focus on being *seen* to be actively participating in all stages of the talks.⁴⁶

That Moscow was less interested in playing a real role in the discussions than in creating such an impression was evident not only from the pattern of two additional visits paid by Gromyko to Syria in May, at the stage when the Soviet Union could hardly keep a close watch on, let alone engage in, the delicate negotiations process, but also from the tone of Brezhnev's congratulatory message to Asad on 30 May, a day before the signing of the agreement. In it he expressed satisfaction with the achievement of the agreement which 'set the beginning of the liberation of Syrian territory occupied by the Israeli invaders' and was the result of close Soviet-Syrian cooperation.⁴⁷

CLOSING RANKS

Despite the satisfactory outcome of the two disengagement agreements, the USSR remained concerned about the future course of the political process in the Middle East. Viewing these agreements both as a means to defuse potential military dangers and as a prelude to a comprehensive settlement, Moscow had nothing against their actual signing. However, the process through which these accords had been reached was far more worrying for the Soviets, since it unequivocally exposed the American advantage over the USSR as a peacebroker,

thus entailing the risk of further erosion of Soviet standing in the region. The sole way to bridge this gap between ends and means, between the USSR's interest in the continuation of the political process and its reluctance to see a *pax Americana* in the Middle East, lay through the reconvening of the Geneva conference. Only by transforming the evolving Arab-Israeli dialogue into a multilateral process could the Soviets hope to compensate for their inherent inferiority *vis-à-vis* the United States on the bilateral level, without, at the same time, tarnishing *détente*. This anxiety was clearly reflected in Brezhnev's 30 May message to Asad which, apart from congratulating the Syrian president on the attainment of the disengagement agreement, emphasized that the time had come for the Geneva peace conference 'to pass over, without wasting any time, to the discussion and solution of all questions of settlement with the aim of ensuring reliable security for all states and peoples of the area'.⁴⁸

For Moscow, the need to reconvene Geneva became far more pressing not only because the major pillar of its Middle Eastern policy, namely Egypt, collapsed in the aftermath of the October War, but also because Syria was showing alarming signs as well. Following the conclusion of the disengagement agreement with Israel, Asad indicated on several occasions, though without distancing himself from the USSR, his interest in fostering the newly established Syrian-American cooperation, emphasizing that Syria's close relations with the USSR should not prevent it from 'winning new friendships in the world'.⁴⁹ Syria's forthcoming approach towards the United States was further illustrated by a series of favourable references on the part of leading Syrian leaders to the American role in the negotiations process,⁵⁰ and even more by the warm reception for President Nixon during his visit to Syria on 15-16 June 1974. The visit produced a number of concrete results, including the restoration of diplomatic relations (broken off in 1967 following the Six-Day War) and an American promise of economic aid totalling \$100 million.⁵¹ According to Syrian sources, Nixon also implied his readiness 'to commit the United States to the search for a comprehensive settlement', but this positive intention was torpedoed by Kissinger.⁵²

Equally worrying from the Soviet standpoint was Syria's economic, and to a lesser extent military, opening to Western Europe. The decision of the Syrian government on 13 March 1974 to lift restrictions on the movement of private capital in and out of Syria as well as to permit the private sector to sign loan agreements with foreign investors, together with declarations by prominent Syrian figures,

including Asad himself, of the need for a greater measure of economic interaction with the West, combined to increase Soviet concern over Syria's future course.⁵³ The Soviets must also have been unhappy about Syria's interest, however limited, in purchasing sophisticated weapons systems (such as electronic-warfare) from France and Britain.⁵⁴

Moscow responded to Damascus's overtures towards the West with its by-now customary policy of intensified support for Syria and delegitimization of US Middle Eastern policy. Thus, alongside a vibrant propaganda campaign which reiterated the importance of Soviet participation in all the stages of the peace process, in mid-June 1974 Syria became the first foreign country ever to receive the prized Soviet MiG-23 fighting aircraft. Within less than a year from the October War, Damascus had already got some \$2 billion in weapons and war *matériel* from the Soviet Union.⁵⁵

While seeking to preserve an air of goodwill towards the United States in the light of the forthcoming Moscow summit between Nixon and Brezhnev, the Soviet media took much care to indicate to Syria where its real interests lay. 'There are obviously some who would like nothing better than to "squeeze out" the Soviet Union and to leave the Arab countries to face alone the combined forces of Zionism and imperialism', argued a *New Times* article, but 'the Arab nations are sufficiently mature politically to take sober stock of the lessons of the recent past and the modifications the USA is obliged to introduce currently in its Middle East policy'.⁵⁶ This is because these modifications were merely cosmetic and aimed at disguising the long-standing American desire 'to complicate further the already tangled Middle East situation, thwart Arab solidarity in the struggle against aggression, and isolate the Arabs from their natural friends and allies, the socialist states'.⁵⁷

Therefore, the Arab countries should not forget who their real friend was. After all, was it not the close Syrian-Soviet collaboration which had made the disengagement agreement feasible? Was it not the Soviet influence that drove the United States to acknowledge, in the joint communiqué following the Moscow June 1974 summit, the 'legitimate interests' of the Palestinian people and the urgency of reconvening the Geneva conference?⁵⁸ On the other hand, the thawing of relations with the United States would do the Arabs no good since 'in itself, the establishment of relations between the United States and a number of Arab states has in no way affected the provocative, aggressive nature of the Israeli policy'.⁵⁹

Whether or not this argument struck a responsive chord in Damascus, it was to Moscow's great relief that the Syrian-American 'honeymoon' ended quickly. Already in the early summer of 1974 Syria realized, to its dismay, that it did not figure high on the American list of priorities. Either because of its eagerness to exploit the Egyptian opening to the full, or because of the difficulties involved in reaching another agreement on the Golan Heights, the US administration decided to leave Syria aside, at least for some time, and to concentrate on achieving an Egyptian-Israeli agreement, to be followed, if possible, by a Jordanian-Israeli agreement.⁶⁰ The end of the Syrian-American honeymoon and the growing differences between Egypt and Syria, gave rise to a convergence of Soviet-Syrian interests. To shore up Syria's relations with the Soviet Union, Asad adopted, for the first time, during talks with Brezhnev in Moscow on 26-27 September, the Soviet position on the need for the immediate reconvening of the Geneva conference. The Soviet leader, for his part, anxious to cement the tentative *rapprochement* with Syria, reciprocated this concession by promising his guest fresh military supplies as well as additional economic aid. As an indication of Soviet backing for Syria, Brezhnev also informed Asad of his intention to visit Syria in January 1975.⁶¹

Soviet-Syrian cooperation grew during the autumn of 1974 as Syria increasingly identified itself with the Soviet demand to reactivate Geneva.⁶² This process culminated in the joint communiqué, issued following Gromyko's visit to Damascus in February 1975, which called for the immediate resumption of Geneva by February or early March 1975 at the latest.⁶³ By that time, Syria had developed into the pivot of Soviet Middle Eastern policy. However interested in improving their shaky position in Egypt and however pleased with Sadat's occasional gestures in late 1974, the Soviets remained wary of the Egyptian president: they rejected his requests for arms and economic aid and focused their efforts on Syria, rendering it extensive political, military and economic support (e.g. deferral of debts).⁶⁴ Indeed, Brezhnev's speech in Kishinev on 11 October 1974 ranked Syria first, before Egypt and Iraq, on the list of countries maintaining 'friendly cooperation' with the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ This trend also found a clear echo in the Soviet press. Writing in *Za Rubezhom* in late February 1975, Igor Belayev, a leading commentator on Middle Eastern affairs, praised Syria's successful handling of its complex domestic and foreign affairs, while emphasizing the growing internal, in particular economic, problems in Egypt.⁶⁶

Similarly, a *Kommunist* article by Lev Tolkunov, chief editor of *Izvestiya*, cited Soviet–Syrian collaboration as a model for other countries. In thinly veiled criticism of the Egyptian approach, Tolkunov argued that

when the Arab states consistently act together with the Soviet Union in the struggle for their rights, then the Israeli aggressors' room for manoeuvre is reduced and they are forced into concessions. When the opposite is the case, the positions of the invader, as a rule, become tougher.⁶⁷

While previous Soviet references to collaboration with Syria reflected, by and large, wishful thinking rather than an existing reality, Tolkunov's analysis was based on far more solid grounds. In contrast with his completely independent conduct during the disengagement talks, in late 1974 Asad cooperated actively with the USSR in obstructing Kissinger's attempts to revive the American 'step-by-step' policy. Most notably, a 'coordination conference' in Cairo on 22 September 1974 between Egypt, Syria and the PLO adopted the Syrian–Soviet approach, namely, the rejection of any partial settlement and the recognition of the PLO as the 'sole representative of the people of Palestine'. These decisions, which were reconfirmed by the Arab League summit conference in Rabat (26–29 October 1974), together with the appearance of Yasser Arafat at the UN General Assembly in November 1974, constituted a major advance for the Soviet–Syrian coalition: they blocked the possibility of a separate Israeli–Jordanian agreement and frustrated, at least temporarily, the American efforts to bring about a second Egyptian–Israeli agreement. During the visit of the Egyptian foreign minister, Ismail Fahmi, to Moscow in mid-October, the USSR and Egypt affirmed their support for the reconvening of Geneva with the participation of the PLO.

In these circumstances it was hardly surprising that during three visits to Damascus – on 11 and 14 October and on 7 November – Kissinger was faced with a unified Soviet–Syrian rejection of any partial arrangements. Amidst a wave of Soviet and Syrian public calls for the reconvening of Geneva, Kissinger held several meetings with Asad only to learn about Damascus's 'firm stand towards the question of peace in the Middle East'.⁶⁸ According to some reports, not only did Asad dismiss out of hand Kissinger's insinuations that Israel might attack Syria unless the latter made some steps in the direction

of negotiations, but he also made the renewal of the United Nations Disengagement Observers Force (UNDOF) mandate after 30 November conditional on some concrete measures, such as a further Israeli withdrawal on the Golan Heights, or at the least the reconvening of Geneva. Moreover, Asad was reported to have told Kissinger that in the event of another separate Israeli–Egyptian agreement, Syria would have no choice but to resort to arms in order to force Israel to make territorial concessions.⁶⁹

Indeed, as the first term of UNDOF mandate was nearing its end, the spectre of yet another Syrian–Israeli conflagration loomed large. With Syria conditioning the continued presence of the UN force on the reactivation of Geneva and the adoption of a timetable for an Israeli withdrawal, and in response to reports on the acceleration of Soviet arms shipments to Syria,⁷⁰ in mid-November Israel began to mobilize reserve forces and moved them to the Golan Heights. These actions were, in turn, interpreted in Damascus and Moscow as an indication of Israel's intention to 'launch a preemptive strike against Syria, in order both to distract public attention from the Palestinian question and to attract more American support, military aid in particular'.⁷¹

Whether or not the Soviets actually believed in the imminence of an Israeli preemptive strike – especially in light of Israel's reassuring statements and American diplomatic efforts to defuse the situation – they certainly benefited from the mounting tension along the Syrian–Israeli border. In the first place, the volatile situation enabled the USSR to reiterate its call for the reconvening of Geneva, so as to prepare the ground for a superpower understanding on this issue during the forthcoming Soviet–American summit in Vladivostok. Secondly, by creating the impression of an impending Israeli attack on Syria (without necessarily believing in such an eventuality), Moscow sought to rally Arab support behind Syria, to appear as a staunch supporter of the Arab cause, and to signal to the US the crucial role of the Soviet Union in any political process in the Middle East.

Hence, Moscow supported the Syrian brinkmanship, a decision which led some observers to conclude that the Syrian action had been coordinated during Asad's September visit to Moscow.⁷² Within this framework, Moscow accelerated arms supplies to Damascus, launched a propaganda campaign on its behalf, dispatched a naval contingent headed by Vice-Admiral Nikolai Khovrin, commander of the Black Sea Fleet, to the Syrian port of Latakia at the height of the crisis (20–25 November), and gave wide publicity to Brezhnev's

intention to visit Syria in January 1975.⁷³ Yet the Soviets were still anxious to prevent the crisis from sliding into open hostilities, and continued to maintain close contacts with the Syrians, urging them not to overplay their hand;⁷⁴ indeed, on 28 November the Security Council approved the extension of UNDOF mandate for an additional six months.

SINAI TWO

The consolidated Soviet–Syrian relationship was put to severe test in early 1975 as a result of a new American initiative to engineer a second separate Egyptian–Israeli agreement. Encouraged by the success of their joint strategy in late 1974 and unwilling to see the United States regaining the leading role in the Middle East, the Soviets sought to pre-empt the new American initiative by dispatching Andrei Gromyko to Damascus and Cairo in early February, a week before the opening of a new stage of Kissinger’s ‘shuttle diplomacy’. When this visit failed to prevent Sadat from embarking on a new round of American-sponsored negotiations with Israel (and despite Damascus’s disappointment with the cancellation of Brezhnev’s visit to the Middle East),⁷⁵ the USSR and Syria coordinated their moves in an attempt to forestall the renewed Egyptian–Israeli dialogue. Both the Soviets and the Syrians ran an aggressive propaganda campaign against partial settlements, or ‘half-way measures’, as they were called.⁷⁶ In addition, Syria sought to consolidate its relations with both the PLO and Jordan, in order to bring these sworn rivals closer together under Syrian leadership, thus increasing Egypt’s isolation in the Arab world. In a brilliant diplomatic move on 8 March, Asad announced Syria’s willingness to unify its political leadership as well as military command with that of the PLO; with the PLO’s acceptance of this invitation a week later, Syria became identified with the Palestinian cause.

Syria’s cooperation with Jordan began in late 1973, when Jordan represented Syrian interests at the Geneva conference, and intensified in late 1974, as the two countries were united in their rejection of the Egyptian search for a separate deal with Israel. The growing Syrian–Jordanian collaboration was also motivated by the shared fear that in case of another Syrian–Israeli war, the main Israeli thrust against Syria would push through the northwestern part of Jordan rather than the heavily fortified Golan Heights. Consequently, in

mid-December 1974 the two leaderships apparently reached an understanding on a joint military policy *vis-à-vis* Israel, to be followed by a far-reaching agreement on economic and technical cooperation in early March.⁷⁷ The Soviets, for their part, sought to encourage the growing Syrian–Jordanian amity by sending Vladimir Vinogradov, the Soviet representative to Geneva, for talks with King Hussein in mid-March.⁷⁸

It is difficult to determine the weight of the Soviet–Syrian strategy in the overall balance of factors leading to the collapse of Kissinger's mediation attempts on 22 March 1975. Yet there is little doubt that the very establishment of the united Syrian–Jordanian–Palestinian front under Soviet blessing further exposed Sadat's isolation in the Arab world, thereby reducing his room for manoeuvre and preventing him from displaying greater flexibility towards Israel. At the same time the Israeli leadership, constrained by domestic political factors (opposition to compromises, the delicate balance of power between Premier Rabin and Defence Minister Peres) and uncertain about the possible implications of unfavourable regional developments (the Iraqi–Iranian agreement of March 1975 in particular), was reluctant to acquiesce to Sadat's demand for a withdrawal from strategic Sinai passes and from the Abu Rodeis oil-fields as long as the Egyptian president did not agree to end the state of belligerency between the two countries. And since Sadat felt unable to do so, the negotiations ran into a cul-de-sac.⁷⁹

But whatever the reasons for the failure of Kissinger's mission, Syria and the USSR perceived this development as both an outcome of their 'principled' policy and an indication that Geneva constituted the most effective means for overcoming the Israeli intransigence. 'The Israeli obstinacy . . . on the one hand, and the unified Arab front's stand and Arab insistence on the liberation of the land and recognition of the Palestinian people's rights, on the other', argued *Radio Damascus* on 24 March, 'have led Kissinger's step-by-step policy to a dead end'. In these circumstances, 'most of the world circles are agreed that . . . the Geneva conference is now the only alternative . . . through which it is possible to resolve the Near East problem and to establish peace and tranquility in this explosive region'.⁸⁰

Throughout the spring of 1975 the Soviet and Syrian media reiterated this optimistic notion which seemed to be based on a rather realistic evaluation of the regional and global situation, for at that time Geneva appeared closer than ever.⁸¹ By 1 April 1975, a week

after the collapse of the disengagement talks, Egypt had already requested the two superpowers to reconvene the Geneva conference, while the US administration announced a reassessment of its Middle Eastern policy. Though it was not long before this 'reassessment' turned out to be merely a cover for US pressure on Israel (whom the administration considered responsible for the breakdown of the talks) to modify its position so as to pave the way for another separate deal, in late March it was interpreted as implying an American readiness to reconsider Geneva; and Kissinger reinforced this impression by stating on 26 March that the Middle East question would have to be negotiated 'comprehensively', and that the United States would be in touch 'with the co-chairman of the [Geneva] conference, the USSR, in the near future'.⁸²

Eager to exploit this window of opportunity to the full, the USSR requested Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and the PLO to send representatives to Moscow for 'preparatory talks' on the reactivation of the Geneva conference.⁸³ When these talks took place during April and May, Syria emerged yet again as the USSR's major Middle Eastern ally: while the discussions with the rest of the Arab guests, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Ismail Fahmi of Egypt, and the PLO's leader, Yasser Arafat, were described by the Soviet media as an 'exchange of opinions' taking place in a 'businesslike atmosphere', Abd al-Khalim Khaddam's meetings were conducted in an 'atmosphere of friendship and complete mutual understanding'.⁸⁴ Moreover, Syria proved far more accomodative to the Soviet position than its Arab counterparts. Unlike the other Arab guests who were reluctant to commit themselves to more than general, vague statements in support for Geneva, Khaddam was deterred from neither reconfirming the 'need for resumption of the Geneva Middle East peace conference at the earliest date, with thorough preparation for and participation of all the sides concerned . . .', nor from undertaking to 'continue to exert all efforts [together with the USSR] to attain these objectives'. The Soviets generously rewarded this position in words, by reaffirming both the 'importance of strengthening the defence potential of the Syrian Arab Republic' and 'Syria's right to use all means to free the occupied Syrian territories', and in deed, by dispatching the Soviet chief of staff, General Victor Kulikov, for an official visit to Damascus on 22 April.⁸⁵

As on past occasions, the Soviets linked their pledge for increased military support to Damascus with an attempt to inject moderation into the Syrian position, this time in the form of a public announce-

ment of readiness to give Israel 'the strictest guarantees [for the preservation of a Middle East settlement] with the participation – under an appropriate agreement – of the Soviet Union, too'.⁸⁶ Indeed, at the time that the distinguished Arab guests were deliberating in Moscow, the Soviets sought to allay Israeli wariness of Geneva by praising the evolving 'peace sentiments' in Israel,⁸⁷ and by dispatching two senior Soviet diplomats on a secret visit to Tel Aviv in an attempt to bridge the wide gap between the Arab and the Israeli positions.⁸⁸

That Syria was not alarmed by the Soviet signals to Israel was evident both from the text of the joint communiqué, which, as noted above, reflected a Soviet–Syrian unity of purpose, and from the close collaboration between the two countries *vis-à-vis* the renewed Egyptian–Israeli negotiations. Hence, during the summer of 1975, Asad reportedly rejected several American requests to join the step-by-step diplomacy, or alternatively, to forgo any attempts to undermine this process. In early May, for example, he declined an invitation to participate in the Salzburg meeting between presidents Ford and Sadat.⁸⁹ Similarly, during a visit to Washington on 20–23 June, the Syrian foreign minister reportedly turned down an American suggestion for a 'cosmetic' Israeli withdrawal on the Golan Heights, emphasizing instead the Syrian conviction that any partial arrangement should be made only within the framework of a comprehensive settlement.⁹⁰

Thus, instead of joining the American mediation effort Asad chose to adhere to the same strategy which, in his view, had obstructed the Egyptian–Israeli negotiations in March. This strategy entailed, first, cooperation with the Soviet Union in discrediting the American policy,⁹¹ and second, attempts to increase Egypt's isolation in the Arab world by fostering the evolving framework of cooperation with Jordan, as well as by seeking to mitigate Syrian–Iraqi hostility. Nevertheless, unlike the March 1975 situation, neither the Soviet–Syrian propaganda campaign nor Egypt's isolation prevented the 'step-by-step policy' from culminating in a three-year Egyptian–Israeli disengagement agreement in September 1975.

For the Soviet Union, the signing of the second disengagement agreement was largely a negative development. For one, it signified the *de facto* termination of almost two decades of close Soviet–Egyptian alignment; the *de jure* breaking-point of this relationship took place a few months later in March 1976, with Egypt's unilateral abrogation of the 1971 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with

the USSR. Second, not only did the agreement – like its predecessor – depict the United States as the only power capable of forcing Israel into territorial concessions, but it also established the American military presence in the region in the form of both US observation devices operated by American personnel and the establishment of procurement relations between Egypt and the United States. Finally, the failure of the Soviet–Syrian effort to forestall the agreement exposed Moscow's limited control over regional developments and its consequent need to lean on local actors in defence of Soviet interests: it was Syria, rather than the Soviet Union, which spearheaded the struggle against a separate Egyptian–Israeli deal, starting with the initiation of the Rabat decisions in October 1974 and ending with the formation of an eastern front to counterbalance Egypt's 'desertion' from the Arab fold. All the Soviets could, and did in effect, do was to strengthen Syria in its vehement rejection of the Egyptian policy and to render it the necessary political, military and propaganda backing.

Yet the Egyptian–Israeli agreement had a major advantage from the Soviet point of view in that it drove Syria even closer to the USSR. Although Asad clearly gained a higher status in the Arab world as a result of Egypt's growing isolation, he perceived Sadat's move both as a betrayal of the Arab cause and as a personal offence by a comrade-in-arms. In Asad's view, the removal of Egypt from the Arab–Israeli conflict upset the regional balance of power in favour of Israel and left Syria alone, as 'an orphan', in the frontline of the Arab struggle.⁹² Wary of King Hussein, distrustful of the Iraqi leadership, concerned over the domestic deterioration in Lebanon, Asad came gradually to the conclusion that, by way of restoring the strategic balance, Syria had to rely primarily, though not exclusively, on its intrinsic resources. This meant both an uncompromising political posture on the issue of a partial settlement and a major drive to enhance Syria's military potential so as to enable it to lead the Arab campaign and, if necessary, to fight Israel on its own.⁹³

Asad's strategic conception, first manifested in September 1975, when Syria reportedly rejected yet another American offer to negotiate a partial agreement with Israel,⁹⁴ largely coincided with the USSR's regional interests. Syria's categorical rejection of a partial settlement with Israel in effect dealt a mortal blow to the American shuttle diplomacy. Moreover, the increased Syrian emphasis on military expansion heralded a further intensification of Soviet–Syrian military relations. Nevertheless, Asad was quick to present the Soviets with a bill for his policy. In a two-day working visit to

Moscow, on 9–10 October, which produced a large-scale arms deal, he clarified to the Soviet leaders that Syria's rejection of the American overtures did not mean automatic support for the Geneva option. Instead of investing futile efforts in reactivating Geneva, the Syrian leader requested Soviet support for his scheme to advance the Palestinian cause by linking the extension of the UNDOF mandate on the Golan Heights with the amendment of Security Council Resolution 242.⁹⁵

The Syrian plan to amend Resolution 242 put Moscow between the hammer and the anvil. After all, this resolution had constituted the general framework for consecutive Soviet peace plans since 1967 and, by extension, the basis for the Geneva conference; its amendment would necessitate a fundamental reorientation in the Soviet position. Still, an objection to the Syrian initiative might create an open rift between the USSR and its major Middle Eastern allies, Syria and the PLO, at a time when Soviet–Egyptian relations were at a low ebb.

The Soviet distress was compounded by the fact that Syria was supporting its initiative with an escalation of tension along its border with Israel: in mid-November the Syrians moved two divisions from the Iraqi border and deployed them on the Golan Heights, thus bringing their overall strength there to four out of five divisions of the Syrian Army.⁹⁶ This military build-up, together with a Palestinian guerilla attack (originating from Syrian territory) on an Israeli settlement on the Golan, combined to bring Israel and Syria closer to war than on any occasion since the conclusion of the disengagement agreement in May 1974.

That the Soviets had much to lose and precious little to gain from the Syrian brinkmanship was evident from both their efforts to defuse the tension on the Golan, and their half-hearted backing of Syria. Apart from the reported arrival of some MiG-23 aircraft in Syria in mid-November (which was not necessarily connected to the events on the Golan), the coverage of the crisis by the Soviet media was a far cry from Moscow's vocal support for Syria during the November 1974 crisis. Thus, while avoiding public criticism of Syria's bid to amend Resolution 242, in no way did the Soviets indicate their approval of the Syrian move. Instead, they chose to capitalize on the crisis in order to resume the campaign for the reactivation of Geneva, and on 9 November 1975 they delivered an official message to the US administration urging it to cooperate with the USSR in reconvening Geneva, with the participation of the PLO 'on an equal footing' from the beginning of the negotiations'.⁹⁷

As on previous occasions, it was the United States that took the Soviets out of their predicament. Faced with unequivocal American opposition to his initiative, Asad abandoned the plan to amend Resolution 242, reducing the price for the extension of the UNDOF mandate to the demand that the Security Council would reconvene in January 1976 for a discussion on the Middle East with the participation of the PLO. Adopted by the Security Council on 30 November 1975, the Syrian compromise proposal was received in Moscow with relief: it removed a potential obstacle in Soviet–Syrian relations and constituted a diplomatic gain for the PLO and a political setback for Israel. Moreover, when the Security Council discussion did, in fact, take place, on 12–26 January 1976, Moscow managed to appear as the champion of the Palestinian cause and to embarrass the United States by bringing it to veto a draft resolution which affirmed the Palestinians’ right to self-determination and statehood and called for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Arab lands occupied in 1967. In any event, the uneasiness in Soviet–Syrian relations attending Syria’s initiative to amend Resolution 242 turned out to be a passing episode; it was not long before the Lebanese question came to overshadow all other aspects of the bilateral relationship.

6 Lebanon

To Syria, Lebanon has never been just another neighbouring country. It is an integral and indivisible part of 'Greater Syria',¹ torn away unjustifiably by France in the wake of the First World War; illustrative of this perceived indivisibility is the fact that no formal diplomatic ties have ever existed between the two countries. As Asad declared:

Throughout history, Syria and Lebanon have been one country and one people with so many genuine interests binding them in common. This must be well realized by everybody. Genuine joint interests, a genuine joint security also resulted. Close kinship in the two countries has also resulted . . . it is difficult to draw a line between Lebanon's security in its broad sense and Syria's security.²

Given this outlook, Syria followed with utmost alarm the eruption of civil war in Lebanon in April 1975, which threatened to destroy the country's delicate social, political and religious fabric. For Syria the Lebanese events were a direct result of an 'imperialist-Zionist' plot, whose goals ranged from the desire to 'cover up the Sinai Agreement' by creating a new regional crisis, to the intention 'to embroil and strike at the Resistance and liquidate its camps', thus forcing Syria to divert its resources from the struggle against Israel, to the wish to bring about the partition of Lebanon.³

This last goal, in particular, was totally unacceptable to Syria. First, the partition of Lebanon along religious lines threatened to have a destabilizing effect on Syria's fragile sectarian edifice. Second, such an eventuality could undermine the concept of a Palestinian 'democratic secular state' which formed the basis of Syria's vision of a Middle Eastern settlement. In Asad's words:

Israel seeks to partition Lebanon in order to defeat the slogan of a democratic secular state – the slogan that we raise . . . when Lebanon is partitioned, the Israelis will say: 'We do not believe these Arabs. If they could not coexist together, if the Muslim Arab could not coexist with the Christian Arab, how then can they coexist with the Jews and the non-Arab Jews who came from all

spots of the earth, from the West and the East'. This slogan will then fall.⁴

Finally, the Syrians feared that the disintegration of Lebanon would provide Israel with an excuse to occupy southern Lebanon up to the Litani River, which in their view had been a long-coveted Zionist goal. Such an occupation would significantly increase Syria's strategic vulnerability by allowing Israel to 'bring the war into the rear of the Syrian-Lebanese Arab territories', while at the same time 'preventing the Syrian forces from using Lebanon in order to outflank the Israeli forces on the Golan'.⁵ Syria's primary concern throughout the various stages of the civil war has therefore been to secure the continued existence of Lebanon as an independent Arab state. As Abd al-Khalim Khaddam said: 'We will never allow the partition of Lebanon. Any move in this direction would mean our immediate intervention. Lebanon used to be a part of Syria and we will restore this fact, once the first attempt at partitioning it takes place . . . either Lebanon remains united or it will have to return to Syria'.⁶

Until the autumn of 1975, either because of its preoccupation with the Egyptian drive for a separate deal with Israel, or as a result of the relative calm in Lebanon, Syria sought to keep its involvement in the Lebanese crisis to a minimum. Though sympathizing with the 'just cause of the Palestinian people' and rendering generous military support to the Palestinian organizations, the Syrians refrained from officially siding with the Muslim-leftist-Palestinian axis in its feud with the Christian-rightist camp, seeking instead to mediate a compromise between the belligerents. This policy clearly demonstrated the Syrian interest, which remained constant through the vicissitudes of the prolonged civil war: namely, to prevent either side from achieving a decisive victory which would undermine Lebanon's internal structure and invite Israeli intervention.

Syrian involvement in the Lebanese crisis acquired a new and deeper dimension in September 1975 with the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian agreement and the escalation of hostilities in Lebanon, both of which increased Syria's feeling of vulnerability and prompted it to move two Syrian-controlled Palestinian battalions – one belonging to the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) and the other to the *Sa'iqa* organization – into Lebanon in late September.⁷ Though these forces were quickly withdrawn from Lebanon at the request of the Lebanese government, their introduction set an important pre-

cedent, to be repeated on a larger scale three months later: on 19 January 1976, following a wide and successful Christian offensive (which the Syrians believed might have led to the *de facto* division of Lebanon), troops of the *Yarmouq* Brigade of the PLA again entered Lebanon to support the Muslim-leftist–Palestinian coalition. Helped by the arrival in Beirut of a Syrian delegation to mediate an agreement, the military intervention produced immediate results: the Christian offensive was checked, and on 22 January a ceasefire came into effect. A month later, on 14 February, the Lebanese president, Suleiman Faranjieh, announced a new ‘national covenant’, modelled on Syrian ideas and produced under Syrian auspices, which stipulated a more egalitarian sharing of power in Lebanon.

However, this ‘national conciliation’ proved short-lived, as the Muslim-leftist frustration over the limited nature of the reforms contained in the ‘national covenant’ manifested itself in a determined effort to eradicate most of the political and economic benefits that remained in Christian hands. Consequently, in early March the ceasefire broke down and, on 15 March, two days after two-thirds of the Lebanese Parliament had signed a petition calling for the resignation of President Faranjieh, leftist forces began a drive against the presidential palace at Baabda with the aim of overthrowing Faranjieh.

This latest development, which threatened to encircle the shrinking Christian enclave, triggered an immediate Syrian response. Again perceiving a danger of partition, this time emanating from the Muslim side, on 15 March Asad ordered the *Sa’iqa* and PLA units in Beirut to halt the leftist drive on Baabda. A few days later, several regular Syrian commando battalions, disguised as PLA and *Sa’iqa* forces, entered Lebanon, and on 8 April a Syrian armoured brigade was moved to the Lebanese border and placed on an advanced state of alert (with some forty tanks reportedly deployed within Lebanese territory), in an attempt to deter the leftists from bringing down a newly attained truce.⁸

Thus, by late March 1976 Syrian policy towards the warring factions in Lebanon had been completely reversed, switching from close alignment with the Muslim–PLO coalition to support of the Christian camp. During the spring of 1976, the two former allies were steadily heading towards a collision, which eventually took place following the election on 8 May of Elias Sarkis, the Syrian-sponsored candidate, as president of Lebanon. Viewed by the leftists as a Syrian puppet, Sarkis’s election led to an escalation of fighting which soon

came to engulf the entire country. Following the failure of a mediation attempt by the Libyan premier, Abd al-Salam Jallud, and as a result of Syria's inability to contain the fighting in Lebanon, Damascus gradually reached the conclusion that the only way to stem the mounting tide of the Lebanese crisis was to launch a direct military intervention: on 1 June 1976 Syria's Third Armoured Division moved into Lebanon.

Syria's attempts to defuse the Lebanese crisis were initially viewed very favourably by Moscow. The Soviets shared the Syrian perception that the Lebanese civil war was the product of an 'imperialist-Zionist' plot, aimed at dividing the Arabs and diverting their attention 'from what is called partial solutions in the Middle East'.⁹ Hence they had nothing against the accretion of influence by their major Middle Eastern ally in an essentially pro-Western country, especially since the Syrian policy appeared at the time to strengthen the Palestinian and leftist forces in Lebanon. Furthermore, they conceded that the 'strong geographical and historical ties' linking Syria and Lebanon, and the 'indivisibility' of the two countries' security, justified Syrian intervention in the face of Israel's secret intention to transform Lebanon into a 'springboard for aggression against Syria'.¹⁰ Syria's keen interest in the Lebanese crisis was therefore not only fully justified, but was also in keeping with the 'principles of respect for sovereignty and independence'.¹¹

In spite of its support for the Syrian aims in Lebanon, Moscow grew uneasy about the growing Syrian military intervention in the crisis. However relieved by the indirect, cautious and incremental nature of this intervention and recognizing its necessity, the Soviets were fully aware of the inflammatory potential of such a move, especially since Israel gave repeated warnings that it would not remain idle if its security were endangered by the developments in Lebanon.¹² Ignoring the Israeli warnings could have risked another Syrian-Israeli conflagration; the alleviation of Israeli apprehensions, on the other hand, required a measure of Syrian-American coordination, since the United States was the only external actor capable of mediating between Israel and Syria. Indeed, already in October 1975, apparently in response to the introduction of PLA forces into Lebanon a month earlier, the United States served as a back-channel between Jerusalem and Damascus by notifying Syria that 'Israel would consider the intervention of foreign armed forces a very big threat, so that no matter what we say to it, it might intervene'.¹³ In the spring of 1976 the Administration deepened its engagement in the

Lebanese crisis by sending the veteran diplomat, Dean Brown, to mediate a compromise between the warring parties.

In these circumstances the Soviets sought to downplay the intensifying Syrian interference in Lebanon and to highlight Damascus's efforts to defuse the crisis. Accordingly, from November 1975 through the spring of 1976 the Soviet media vehemently rejected Israeli allegations of a physical Syrian interference in the Lebanese crisis, attributing such accusations to Tel-Aviv's desire 'to fuel the conflict', so as 'to create a suitable pretext for occupying southern Lebanon – which would be the first step on the way to partitioning the country'.¹⁴

Soviet praise for Syria's role in Lebanon notwithstanding, their fear of a major escalation grew significantly in March 1976 when Syria turned against its former ally, the leftist-Palestinian coalition. True, this development did have a positive facet: it diminished the likelihood of a Syrian-Israeli war, since Israel changed its position on Syrian military intervention in Lebanon from publicly proclaimed opposition to tacit approval. Israel was not interested in preventing Syrian action in favour of the Christians, provided that Syria recognized the 'red lines' concerning the 'rules of conduct', as well as the geographical boundaries within which Syrian operations would be tolerated.¹⁵

Yet the deepening rift between Syria and the 'progressive camp' – both major Soviet allies – put Moscow in a zero-sum position, where support for one side would almost certainly alienate the other. Furthermore, this feud threatened to undermine the 'rejectionist front' which Moscow sought to cement, since Iraq, Libya and Algeria unequivocally sided with the leftist-Palestinian alliance. Finally, the Soviets were faced with a worrying convergence of Syrian and American interests based on their joint goal of weakening the leftist-PLO forces.

In order to overcome these conflicting interests, the Soviets chose to support the Syrian line, while at the same time trying to avoid alienating their allies on the left. This policy reflected Syria's growing importance to the Soviet Union (which exceeded by far that of the PLO and the Lebanese left put together), as well as Soviet awareness of the reactive and reluctant nature of Syrian intervention in Lebanon. After all, it was the leftist camp, not Syria, which was responsible for the March 1976 escalation. Syrian military intervention, controversial as it was, was aimed at defusing a highly explosive situation and, in effect, constituted the only means of saving Lebanon

from sliding into complete anarchy, if not from falling apart. Consequently, the major responsibility for the defusion of the crisis lay with the leftist-Palestinian coalition: as long as this camp exercised self-restraint, its confrontation with Syria could be contained and the internationalization of the Lebanese conflict (i.e. Arab and/or Western interference) could still be averted.

In keeping with this line, in mid-March the Soviets complimented Syria on persuading President Faranjieh to quit his post six months before his term expired, describing this step as 'opening the way to resolving the crisis'.¹⁶ Similarly, Moscow had only praise for the Syrian success on 16 April in achieving a general ceasefire:

Loyal as it is to the principles of consolidating inter-Arab solidarity in the struggle against imperialism and Zionism, Syria is making serious constructive efforts aimed at the settlement of the Lebanese crisis. Its mediatory mission is aimed, primarily, at ending the fratricidal clashes, preserving the unity and independence of Lebanon, organizing rebuff to the attempts to eliminate the Palestine resistance movement.¹⁷

Later on, when the situation in Lebanon deteriorated, the Soviets were quick to congratulate Elias Sarkis, the new president, on his election, and described this development as contributing to the de-escalation of tensions in the country.¹⁸ Moreover, in an attempt to signal to the leftist-Palestinian bloc the desirability of collaborating with the newly elected president, *Pravda* claimed, on 13 May, that 'the progressive forces are ready to cooperate with the new administration'.

As late as 28 May 1976, three days before the Syrian Third Division began rolling into Lebanon, the Soviet media issued a strongly worded announcement supporting the Syrian pacification efforts in Lebanon as well as Syria's leading role in the Arab world:

The attempt to besmirch the Syrian mediation mission in Lebanon has been another aspect of imperialist and reaction pressure on Damascus. The enemies of the Arabs are using every means to stir up strife between the Lebanese and the Syrian nationalist forces with the aim of driving Damascus out of the anti-imperialist line and destroying the [Palestinian] Resistance and the nationalist movement in Lebanon . . . in their plots against Syria, imperialism and reaction are aiming in particular to undermine the Syrian

National Progressive Front [whose unity] is the fundamental factor determining Syria's anti-imperialist course and . . . enabling Syria to take the leadership of the liberation movement of all the Arab peoples.¹⁹

Against this backdrop one may question the conventional wisdom that the direct Syrian intervention in Lebanon on 1 June 1976 defied the Soviet position, with Moscow having no foreknowledge of it.²⁰ True, the Syrian entry into Lebanon started while the Soviet premier, Alexei Kosygin, was on his way from Baghdad to Damascus for a state visit. Yet this fact should be construed neither as an open rebuff to Kosygin nor as an intention to present him with a *fait accompli*. If anything, it reflected Syria's awareness of Moscow's delicate position. Since direct military intervention was perceived by Damascus as a last resort to prevent the disintegration of Lebanon, it *had* to be undertaken, and on the earliest date possible. The postponement of the Syrian intervention until Kosygin's departure would have portrayed this move as a Soviet-Syrian collusion, thus putting the USSR in an awkward position *vis-à-vis* its Arab allies, on the one hand, and providing a pretext for increased Western (or Israeli) interference in the conflict, on the other. As things were, the USSR was able to keep its options open: to endorse the Syrian move at a later stage, or to distance itself from it – as indeed happened – should the need arise.

Moreover, the direct military intervention in Lebanon was not an isolated act; rather it marked the culmination of a prolonged incremental intervention, which had hitherto received Soviet approval. Asad, therefore, had little reason to anticipate any Soviet opposition to his move, particularly in light of the unity of purpose achieved between the two countries regarding the Lebanese conflict.²¹ Finally, the Syrian decision to intervene in Lebanon was preceded by intensive consultations with external actors. During the second half of May, Asad discussed the Lebanese developments with a whole host of Arab visitors, and even took care to clarify to the United States that any intervention in Lebanon 'was not aimed at Israel, but was meant to save Lebanon'.²² Thus, it is inconceivable that the Soviets were kept in the dark about the intervention: during May Asad held at least one meeting with the Soviet ambassador to Damascus.²³

If the Syrian move into Lebanon created tension between the USSR and Syria, the two sides failed to give it any public expression during Kosygin's visit to Damascus on 1–4 June. In an attempt to placate Kosygin, the Syrians agreed to include a statement in support

of Geneva in the joint communiqué: a gesture they had avoided since late 1975.²⁴ In return, Kosygin promised his country's continued assistance to 'friendly Syria in consolidating its defence potential'²⁵ and, perhaps most importantly, tacit support for the Syrian intervention in Lebanon. According to Syrian sources, Kosygin told Asad that 'while the USSR approved of Syrian actions in Lebanon, the Syrians should not expect any public declarations of support because of the Soviet commitment to the Palestinians'.²⁶ Nevertheless the joint communiqué, issued at the close of Kosygin's visit, contained a veiled endorsement of the Syrian action in Lebanon:

The two sides expressed deep concern over the continuing crisis in Lebanon which is a result of plotting by the forces of imperialism and Zionism. They confirmed their resolve to continue to work towards ending the bloodshed, restoring security and peace in Lebanon and ensuring its integrity, independence and sovereignty.²⁷

Soviet references to the Lebanese crisis following Kosygin's visit afford a further illustration of Moscow's support for Syria. According to the Soviet media, the Syrian intervention took place at the request of the 'official authorities' in Lebanon, and was motivated by 'national duty towards a sister nation', as well as by 'compassion for the victims of the bloodshed between Arab brothers'. Aimed at 'normalizing the situation . . . restoring order and facilitating the achievement of a ceasefire', this action took place only after 'all attempts by the national forces leading to a political settlement of the crisis had failed'. However limited in scope, the Syrian presence in Lebanon had exerted an immediate positive impact on the crisis by 'helping to ease the situation in a number of areas'. Hence, and given the Soviet 'thorough understanding' of the positions of those striving to 'achieve national unity' and to 'halt the bloodshed', Syria 'can always rely on the support of the USSR'.²⁸

In addition, and in keeping with its policy in previous Middle Eastern crises, such as the 1970 Syrian invasion of Jordan and the October War, the USSR backed its expressions of support with demonstrative military activities. Between 28 May and 4 June 1976, the number of Soviet surface vessels in the Mediterranean was doubled and a naval presence was established opposite the Lebanese coast.²⁹ This augmentation, which came as a response to the growing Western, in particular American, naval presence in the eastern

Mediterranean, aimed at signalling to the Western powers the inadmissibility of any interference on their part in the Lebanese crisis. Its timing indicated a measure of Soviet foreknowledge, or at least anticipation, of the impending Syrian intervention. It is thus part of the overall pattern of support for the Syrian move.

In spite of this, Moscow was quick to distance itself from the operation when, within a few days, it got bogged down – with the invading forces suffering heavy casualties. In an official *TASS* statement published on 9 June, the Soviets, for the first time, pronounced a direct harsh criticism of the Syrian initiative in Lebanon:

The Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly stated that the mission of the troops sent by it to Lebanon was to help stop the bloodshed. Attention must, however, be drawn to the fact that an ever-swelling river of blood continues to flow in Lebanon today. . . . The first thing to be done in Lebanon, therefore, is to stop the bloodshed. All those parties involved in the Lebanese events, in one way or another, must cease fire forthwith.

What were the reasons for this sudden change in the Soviets' policy? According to the Syrian minister of information, Ahmad Iskandar Ahmad, it 'could be traced back to their loss of naval facilities in Alexandria and Marsa Matruh in Egypt. They needed bases in the Mediterranean. This was requested from Syria but was categorically refused. It seems, therefore, that the Russians hoped that in the eventuality of the Left and the Palestinians controlling Lebanon, they would be given naval facilities'.³⁰

However intriguing, this view hardly seems plausible. First, if the desire for naval facilities did, in fact, lie at the root of the Soviets' behaviour, how can one explain their positive attitude towards Syria's Lebanese policy until 9 June, several months after Damascus had turned against the leftist-Palestinian coalition? Second, a leftist-Palestinian regime in Lebanon – a most remote eventuality, given both the Lebanese internal balance of forces and Israel's deep anxiety over events there – would not necessarily lead to Soviet access to naval facilities. Finally, the USSR had no need to place its hopes for naval facilities on the hypothetical policy of a non-established regime: in May 1976, Syria agreed to give the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron access to offshore facilities at the port of Tartus.

A more credible explanation for the Soviet behaviour lies in their

disappointment with the indecisive nature of the Syrian intervention. It should be remembered that Moscow's approval of Syria's incremental military interference in Lebanon had never been wholehearted. Rather, it reflected the belief that, given the balance of forces, opportunities and risks, Syria's growing influence was the only factor that could prevent the disintegration of Lebanon. In supporting Syria's June 1976 intervention, the Soviets presumably anticipated that a limited, yet decisive, campaign would suffice to restore stability in Lebanon, without creating an irrevocable rift between Syria and the leftist camp or inciting external intervention. Once the Syrian operation got bogged down, they apparently concluded that Syria's policy in Lebanon had entered the stage of diminishing returns, and that its continuation could only worsen the situation. In other words, 'the Soviet Union was recoiling less from Syria's intervention in Lebanon than from its failure to be quick and bold enough to tip the scales and thereby spare Moscow an embarrassing situation'.³¹

Whatever the reasons for the Soviet change of tack, there is little doubt that the TASS statement of 9 June constituted a turning point in Moscow's policy towards the Syrian intervention, from half-hearted support to overt opposition. With Syria responding in kind, bilateral relations abruptly plunged to their lowest ebb since Asad's ascendancy to power.

7 Towards a Bilateral Treaty

RECONCILIATION

The abating of the Lebanese crisis in late 1976 laid the basis for the recovery of Soviet–Syrian relations from the low point to which they had sunk following Syria’s military intervention in Lebanon. With the Lebanese situation stabilized and the *pax Syriana* recognized by the Arab world, the Soviets no longer had any reason to oppose the Syrian role. Moreover, given Syria’s growing importance for the USSR’s Middle Eastern interests, Moscow could hardly afford to continue to alienate Damascus. The Soviets’ sense of urgency in reaching a *rapprochement* with Syria was further enhanced by the election of Jimmy Carter to the presidency and the consequent thrust towards a peace settlement.

On the face of it, the inauguration of the Carter Administration in January 1977 was a positive development from the Soviet point of view. In contrast with the Nixon–Kissinger step-by-step diplomacy, Carter sought to achieve a comprehensive settlement through the Geneva framework; reacting against the Republican exclusionist approach, he viewed the USSR as a legitimate partner in his peace endeavour, as indicated by the (albeit short-lived) US–Soviet statement on the Middle East of 1 October 1977 (the Vance–Gromyko Statement), which set the boundaries of an Arab–Israeli settlement to be negotiated through the Geneva conference. Yet, knowing that without Syria – their dowry for a negotiated settlement – any political settlement would sooner or later be monopolized by the United States, the Soviets sought to re-establish the close coordination and cooperation that had characterized Soviet–Syrian relations prior to the Lebanese crisis. Hence Moscow’s tacit recognition of the Syrian presence in Lebanon from November 1976 onwards; hence, also, the lifting of the arms embargo and the invitation of Asad to Moscow in January 1977.

Moscow’s shows of goodwill were not immediately reciprocated by Damascus. Having established control over Lebanon and set up a close pattern of cooperation with Jordan, Syria did not share the Soviet anxiety for a rapid reconciliation; instead it sought to ‘forge an

Arab bloc strong enough to become a regional power able to stand up to pressure from either of the superpowers',¹ by consolidating its relations with Saudi Arabia and reconstructing the strategic alliance with Egypt. On 18–21 December 1976, Asad paid an official visit to Cairo, where the two leaders decided to establish a unified political command as a preliminary step on the road to Syrian–Egyptian unification. The harbinger of the renewed bilateral cooperation was the joint call for the reconvening of Geneva by March 1977, with the full participation of all parties, including the PLO.

Despite their longstanding advocacy of the need for both Arab solidarity and the reactivation of Geneva, the Soviets viewed with considerable concern the formation of the unified Arab front, which threatened to pull Syria into the Saudi–Egyptian–Jordanian camp. Especially alarming was the possibility that Syria, by way of adopting a unified approach with its Arab allies, would subordinate Palestinian interests to those of Jordan. Such apprehensions were not completely unfounded: not only did Syria, in early 1977, indicate a willingness to support the new American peace initiative, without coordinating its position with the USSR, but in January 1977 both Egypt and Syria spoke openly of a possible link between Jordan and a future Palestinian entity. Moreover, Asad's insistence on a unified Arab delegation in Geneva – a reflection of his unequivocal rejection of any direct negotiations with Israel and his desire to prevent the Geneva conference from becoming a cover-up for separate deals with Israel – was interpreted by the Soviets as an indication of Syria's readiness to compromise the Palestinian cause. Indeed, contrary to numerous past pledges, in early 1977 Asad did not dismiss the possible reconvening of Geneva without the PLO. In his words:

If the PLO does not wish to take part in Geneva, we shall not exert any pressure to force it to participate. In that event the Arab states concerned will meet to decide what to do towards the liberation of the occupied Arab territories. . . . What should be clear is that the refusal of the PLO to participate will not cause any paralysis in the movement of the Arab states concerned.²

Dismayed as they were with the Syrian position, the Soviets avoided direct criticism of Asad. Accordingly, neither the suggestion for a possible link between the Palestinian state and Jordan, nor the idea of a joint Arab delegation to Geneva was ascribed to Syria; rather they were attributed to Egypt and other 'reactionary circles' who

sought to 'tame' the Palestinians and to avert the creation of 'a really independent Palestinian state'.³

Luckily for Moscow, the 'Arab bloc' did not get very far. Asad's categorical insistence on a joint Arab delegation was totally unacceptable to Sadat, who resented the idea of constraining Egyptian diplomacy; this dispute injected a strong element of mutual distrust into Syrian-Egyptian relations, poisoning them from the outset. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, was perceived by Asad as a hegemonic power, interested in 'calling the political tune in the area . . . [by] attempting to play Syria off against Egypt and to keep both on a tight financial rein'.⁴

Syria was also quickly disillusioned with the USA's Middle Eastern policy. In March 1977, following Carter's public commitment to the concept of 'defensible borders' for Israel, Syria concluded that 'the difference between the policies of the US Democratic and Republican Parties is that the former has no clear features of specific identity, while both search for a solution at the expense of Arab rights and territories'.⁵

Subsequently, and without closing the door on the American peace efforts (after all, Jimmy Carter was the first American president to publicly recognize the need for a Palestinian homeland), Syria decided to improve its bargaining position *vis-à-vis* both superpowers by mending its fences with the USSR. In March 1977, two months after rejecting a Soviet request for a summit meeting,⁶ Asad informed the USSR of his willingness to improve bilateral relations, and on 18 April a high-ranking Syrian delegation, headed by Asad, arrived in Moscow for an official visit.

That the importance of the visit was lost neither to the USSR nor to Syria was clearly evidenced by the lavish exchange of compliments between Brezhnev and Asad. Both leaders took much care to emphasize the 'strategic nature' of Soviet-Syrian relations, as well as their 'community of vital interests' and 'identity of principled outlook'; and both expressed their confidence that just as this solid edifice had enabled the two countries to encounter 'the most difficult phases and pass them successfully', so it would guarantee the 'continued growth and strength' of this relationship in the future.⁷

The high rhetoric, it is true, did not prevent the two parties from addressing a host of disputed issues, ranging from disagreement over Syrian support for the Eritrean Liberation Front,⁸ through the turbulent Iraqi-Syrian relationship to the Geneva peace conference. Thus, Brezhnev was not deterred from reminding his guest yet again

of Israel's right for secure existence; nor did he fail to criticize Syria's insistence on a unified Arab delegation in Geneva by emphasizing that 'not a single decision affecting the Arab people of Palestine, be taken without the Palestinians or against their will'.⁹

Yet these differences did not affect the general atmosphere which remained positive, perhaps even cordial, with consensus and convergence overshadowing divergence and disagreement. To judge from the wide coverage of the visit in the Soviet and Syrian media,¹⁰ and the text of the joint communiqué, there is little doubt that a reconciliation was achieved:

The USSR and the Syrian Arab Republic attach *paramount importance* to the development of mutual political relations and believe that *firm relations* in this field favourably affect Soviet-Syrian economic, commercial and other cooperation. As shown by experience, personal contacts between the leaders of both countries play a special part in the strengthening of Soviet-Syrian friendship, and they are going to maintain them in the future too.¹¹

On top of this public statement of friendship Asad managed to extract both Soviet approval of the Syrian role in Lebanon and a pledge of economic, technical, and military aid: on 21 April, the day before his departure, a bilateral agreement on technical and economic cooperation was signed; a new arms deal between the two countries was apparently also signed in late June 1977, during a visit to Moscow by Defence Minister Tlas.¹² These gestures were repaid by vocal Syrian support for the earliest convocation of the Geneva conference, and, more significantly, for the 'important role in preparing and holding the Geneva conference the Soviet Union was called upon to play in its capacity as co-chairman'.¹³

Thus ended Asad's visit, leaving the two parties extremely pleased. Emerging in the enviable position of being courted by both superpowers, Asad could proceed to reassert Syria's independence: on 9 May 1977 he met President Carter in Geneva for discussions which were described by the Syrian media as a 'decisive point in the development of the Middle East problem'.¹⁴ The Soviets, for their part, could point out, with a real sense of satisfaction, that even such newspapers as the *Washington Post* and the *Christian Science Monitor*, which 'tried hard to misrepresent the real essence of Soviet-Syrian relations', were forced to acknowledge the coincidence of the views of Moscow and Damascus.¹⁵

To be sure, Moscow would have preferred Syria to rely exclusively on its Soviet ally. But knowing how zealously Asad guarded Syrian independence, as illustrated by his defiance of the Soviet position during the 1976 Lebanese crisis, it had to be satisfied with the limited degree of coordination offered by Damascus. On the other hand, the USSR was well aware of Asad's uncompromising stance on both the framework of an Arab-Israeli settlement and the question of direct negotiations with Israel; hence, it had little reason to expect America to succeed where years of Soviet efforts had failed to produce results. Moreover, the election in May 1977 of Menachem Begin, the leader of the right-wing Likud Party, as the Israeli premier was judged by the Soviets to be a serious constraint on the ability of the United States to produce an Arab-Israeli settlement. As Pavel Demchenko, a leading Soviet commentator on the Middle East, put it:

While recognizing the importance of the US role in a Near East settlement, Syria in no way believes that the Americans have ninety nine percent of the cards in their hands for resolving this question. . . . Peace cannot be presented as a gift from the United States. The opportunities for peace are growing in direct proportion to the intensification of Arab strength.¹⁶

This Soviet optimism soon turned out to be well grounded. On 2 August 1977 Sadat met the American secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, in Cairo and suggested – without prior consultation with Syria – that Arab and Israeli foreign ministers should meet in the US in a 'working group' to discuss procedural matters before the reconvening of the Geneva conference. The Egyptian suggestion, quickly endorsed by Israel, was equally unacceptable to Moscow and Damascus. With the experience of the disengagement talks still fresh in mind, both leaderships interpreted Sadat's move as an indication of Egypt's willingness to enter yet again into a separate, American-sponsored negotiations process which might eventually culminate in a *pax Americana*.

Thus, upon arriving in Damascus, Secretary Vance was faced with a vehement rejection of the Egyptian idea. 'Undoubtedly, when Brother President Anwar al-Sadat proposed the formation of this group, he wanted to give momentum to the peace process', Asad told his American guest, however 'I do not know whether he assessed the negative aspects of this idea. From the first glance we, in Syria, do

not see any great benefits to be derived from forming this group . . . [therefore] no meetings will take place between the Arab foreign ministers and the foreign minister of Israel, either directly or indirectly'.¹⁷

This Syrian position was highly praised by Moscow. 'It is no coincidence that the Egyptian proposal was positively received by the Israeli prime minister', it was argued, for 'the alleged working group will undoubtedly be an opportunity for anti-Palestinian manoeuvres. In these circumstances, Syria had no alternative but to reject the proposal to set up a working group'. Moreover,

The logic of the Syrian stand is further strengthened by the fact that some American papers immediately linked the creation of this so-called working group with the likelihood of holding new Arab-Israeli talks under the auspices of the United States and not through the Geneva peace conference.¹⁸

It is not difficult to understand the Soviet enthusiasm. For a while it seemed that, similar to Damascus's contribution to the obstruction of the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement talks in March 1975, Asad's dogged adherence to his course in August 1977 would deal a decisive blow at the evolving American-inspired political process. Yet it was not long before the Syrian position set in train a chain of events which was to overwhelm both Moscow and Damascus – indeed, the entire world.

Confronted with Syrian intransigence, Carter, who remained committed to the attainment of a comprehensive settlement, proved reluctant to follow Kissinger's trail in pursuing a separate Egyptian-Israeli deal; instead he drew closer to the Soviet Union in an attempt to reach a superpower consensus on both the components of a political settlement and the road to its attainment. This resulted in the Vance-Gromyko Statement. The Egyptian reaction to the American policy was abrupt: on 9 November, having failed to convince Syria (and Israel) to hold preliminary talks on the agenda of the Geneva conference, and viewing the Vance-Gromyko Statement as a conspiracy by the superpowers to impose a settlement, Sadat announced his willingness to go to Jerusalem and talk to the parliament there, if it would help the cause of peace. Ten days later, having received an official invitation from Premier Begin, Sadat arrived in Jerusalem.

NOVEMBER 1977 AND AFTER

Sadat's visit to Jerusalem introduced a profound, though not precipitous, change in the balance of Soviet-Syrian relations, which has lasted, albeit with occasional vicissitudes, to date. Until November 1977 the USSR's dependence on Syria – the only remaining pro-Soviet country directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict – exceeded by far Syria's anxiety to maintain close relations with Moscow. This imbalance was reversed following Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, as Syria's growing sense of vulnerability narrowed the gap between Soviet and Syrian assessments of the value of their bilateral relationship.

For Syria, the visit was most traumatic. Not only did Sadat break the most sacred political and ideological Arab taboo, but his move also undermined Syria's ability to advance its own national goals. Differences, distrust and hostility apart, Asad never forgot that it had been the alliance with Egypt that had made Syria's greatest achievement – the October War – possible. Egypt's crucial role in Syria's 'grand strategy' was clearly evident from Asad's willingness, if not eagerness, to rebuild the strategic alliance with Egypt in late 1976, in spite of the signing of the second Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement in September 1975.

Now that Sadat had broken the 'rules of the game', Asad was forced to conclude that the strategic balance between the Arabs and Israel had been seriously upset and that Syria *alone* would have to shoulder the burden of confronting Israel. In Ahmad Iskandar Ahmad's words:

The balance of power has been tipped in favour of the Zionist enemy following Sadat's step and his attempt to isolate Egypt from our Arab nation and wipe out Egypt's Arab and national aspirations. Syria is seeking to build a defence capability that would achieve a strategic military balance between itself and the Zionist enemy. Syria considers that, even if Syria's national voice remains alone as the voice struggling against the enemy, it will remain steadfast and will cling to the rights which, naturally, are Arab rights.¹⁹

Since the attainment of this goal required an unprecedented expansion of Syria's military power, Damascus's dependence on Soviet

military aid grew considerably, thus enhancing Moscow's bargaining position *vis-à-vis* Syria. Hence, it was with 'cap in hand that Khaddam rushed to Moscow a week after Sadat's Knesset appearance and that the Chief of Staff Shihabi followed him a month later'.²⁰

The improvement of Moscow's relative position owed also to the fact that, while joining Syria in opposing Sadat's peace initiative,²¹ the Soviets did not share the intensity of Asad's anxiety over the adverse implications of the visit. Quite the contrary, the opportunities offered by Sadat's visit appeared to Moscow to exceed its potential risks. In the first place, well aware of Begin's 'hawkish' views, the Soviets probably assessed that the Israeli-Egyptian dialogue was bound to fail. Second, given America's initial coolness towards Sadat's initiative (on 22 November 1977 the US deputy secretary of state, Warren Christopher, voiced strong support for the Vance-Gromyko Statement and for the Soviet role in a Middle East peace settlement), the USSR presumably judged the establishment of a *pax Americana* to be unlikely; indeed, the Soviets remained optimistic until quite a late stage that the Carter Administration would do its best to bring the Egyptian-Israeli dialogue back into the Geneva framework. Finally, and most importantly, Sadat's visit gave the USSR a unique opportunity to rally its Arab supporters into a cohesive front, in an attempt to undermine the evolving peace process. The months following the visit witnessed a pilgrimage of delegations from Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, South Yemen and the PLO to Moscow, where they were promised political and material support. The USSR voiced warm praise for the Tripoli and the Algiers summits, 2-5 December 1977 and 2-5 February 1978, which established the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation and laid down the principles for its operation.²²

Moscow's decision to align itself with the rejectionist line must have been an easy one. Support for the Egyptian initiative would have endangered Moscow's position amongst its Arab allies, while it was unlikely to produce any rewards from Sadat, given the state of Soviet-Egyptian relations at the time. Moreover, the Soviets apparently reasoned that once the Egyptian-Israeli dialogue had run its unsuccessful course, the USSR would be in a better position to push for the revival of the Geneva process. Even if – the worst scenario – the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations were to culminate in a separate deal under American auspices, this would not necessarily contradict Soviet Middle Eastern interests. Assuming that Egypt's example would not be followed by other Arab states (as indeed happened), a

separate Egyptian–Israeli agreement could only be expected to add fuel to Arab rejectionism. This, in turn, would increase Egypt's isolation, alienate more Arab countries from the United States, including perhaps some conservative regimes, and present the USSR as the champion of the Arab cause.

In these circumstances, a balance was struck between the USSR's reliance on Syrian political support and Syria's growing dependence on Soviet military backing. On the one hand, Syria retained its pivotal role in Soviet Middle Eastern strategy. Being the only member of the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation immediately adjoining Israeli territory, Syria's opposition to, or alternatively support for, the Egyptian–Israeli peace process could influence more than anything else the success or failure of the anti-Sadat campaign. Further, as the sole member of the Front recognizing, however reluctantly, Resolution 242 and supporting the Geneva conference, Syria might be a crucial ally in any future Soviet thrust towards a comprehensive peace settlement.

On the other hand, Moscow's awareness of Syria's growing need for military support enabled it to charge higher prices for its services to Damascus. If the attainment of strategic parity with Israel had become Syria's primary foreign policy goal, and if the USSR was the only country capable of making this goal feasible, then the Soviets had to be more richly rewarded, on the bilateral level as well as the regional. Reinforced from 1978 to 1980 by the growing domestic and regional difficulties facing the Asad regime, this reasoning manifested itself in an increasing number of Syrian allusions to the possibility of raising Soviet–Syrian relations to a higher, perhaps even a formalized level.

TOWARDS A FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION TREATY

A vivid illustration of the evolving qualitative change in Soviet–Syrian relations was afforded already in February 1978, when a highly celebrated visit by Asad to Moscow yielded substantial results for both parties. Thus, not only did the Soviets treat Asad as the spokesman of the 'progressive Arab camp', but they also displayed greater leniency than ever before towards Syria's position on the issue of a political settlement. Apart from condemning Egypt's 'capitulationist actions' and calling to abandon the thrust towards separate deals in favour of a quest for a comprehensive settlement,

the joint communiqué issued at the close of the visit contained a new element which had been missing from previous Soviet statements on the Middle East, and which implied Soviet readiness to expand the basis of a peace settlement beyond Security Council Resolution 242, namely, recognition of 'the Palestinians' right to return to their homeland in accordance with UN resolutions'.²³

Another, and no less important result of the visit was the signing of a \$500 million Soviet–Syrian arms deal.²⁴ The exceptional significance of this deal lay neither in its conclusion nor its scope, but rather in the overall politico-strategic framework within which it was signed. That is to say, the agreement constituted the first concrete manifestation, albeit limited,²⁵ of Soviet willingness to support Syria's quest for a strategic parity with Israel. According to *al-Thawra*, the two countries agreed to 'formulate measures for the expansion of the defensive capabilities of Syria, a country of confrontation and steadfastness, to guarantee the strategic balance between it and the Zionist enemy, because it is now the main confrontation front against the Zionist-imperialist plots since the Sadat regime has excluded Egypt from the arena of the Arab–Israeli conflict'.²⁶

Syria rewarded the Soviet generosity both by praising Moscow's 'all-round support for the progressive Arab states', and by reiterating its unqualified support for the USSR's participation in a Middle East peace settlement. Also, and not dissimilar to the April 1977 communiqué, the two parties stressed the importance of developing bilateral political relations. But while in April 1977 this statement of intention implied a reconciliation following a deep crisis, in February 1978 it signalled a growing Syrian receptiveness to the idea of a firmer institutionalization of Soviet–Syrian relations.

Indeed, it was not long before Syria's fear of a separate Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty manifested itself in public allusions to the possibility of concluding a bilateral Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the USSR. Thus, as noted earlier, in September 1978 Khaddam called upon the members of the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation to conclude defence agreements with the USSR. A few weeks later Asad was empowered by the third summit conference of the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation, held in Damascus following the signing of the Camp David accords, to 'contact the Soviet Union in the name of the Front to discuss the possibility of developing relations between the Soviet Union and the Front, which would lead to further military and political support, the restoration of the balance of military and political power in the region, and the

strengthening and deepening of friendship between the Soviet Union and the member states of the Front'.²⁷

Since the restoration of the strategic balance meant, first and foremost, the enhancement of Syria's military potential, it was natural that the USSR would expect concrete bilateral returns from Syria. And indeed, the Soviets apparently took up the issue of a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty during Asad's visit to Moscow on 5–6 October 1978.²⁸ 'The Soviet Union highly assesses the Syrian leadership's course for utmost development and consolidation of the friendship and cooperation between our countries', said Brezhnev in his dinner speech honouring Asad, and added: 'On our part, we are also prepared to *more widely extend the framework of our all-round cooperation and, above all, in the political sphere*'.²⁹

Asad responded in kind. 'While we begin our consultations today on the dangerous development of events in our region', he stated, 'we also want – and we intend – to show such interest in the issues of consolidating the ties of friendship and cooperation with the USSR on a bilateral basis. . . . These relations have borne substantial fruit and we are confident that their yield will be even greater'.³⁰ The fact that neither these warm words nor the already-standard formula regarding the importance of developing political relations implied a Syrian readiness to formalize bilateral relations, did little to cloud the friendly atmosphere. On the contrary, according to Syrian sources the USSR displayed complete understanding for Syria's intention to restore the regional balance 'under all circumstances', promising it the necessary military and economic aid in meeting its new obligations.³¹ That this version offers an accurate account of the Soviet behaviour is validated not only from the text of the joint communiqué, but also by the tone of the Soviet media on the eve of the visit, which sought to convince the Arabs that it was only the USSR and the other Socialist countries which were 'capable, by sheer weight, to change the balance of power against the interest of imperialism and its lackey Israel'.³²

Encouraged by the Soviet receptiveness to Syria's military needs, in late November 1978 Hikmat Shihabi arrived in Moscow to work out the details of a new large-scale arms deal, only to be confronted by an unexpected Soviet refusal to supply Syria with sophisticated weapons systems (i.e. T-72 tanks, MiG-25 aircraft), promised to Asad a month earlier. The reasons for the reversal in the Soviet position remain somewhat obscure. It has been argued, for example, that this change of tack was motivated by Moscow's desire to exploit

Syria's growing dependence on Soviet aid following the Camp David Accords in order to pressure it into a bilateral treaty.³³ But this explanation is doubtful if only because the Soviets could have pressurized Asad on this issue already in October. What sense did it make for Moscow to make far-reaching pledges of military support in October, only to rebuff them a month later? Moreover, given Syria's steady shift towards a bilateral treaty – in late October 1978 Khaddam reiterated the possibility of concluding such an accord³⁴ – the Soviets could afford to wait for the ripening of a Syrian decision on this issue, rather than to risk a crisis with Damascus.

A more plausible explanation would, therefore, be that the change in the Soviet position resulted from an unexpected development that took place between Asad's and Shihabi's visits, namely the sudden reconciliation between the embattled Syrian and Iraqi regimes.³⁵ On 24 October 1978, in response to an invitation by the Iraqi leadership, Asad flew to Baghdad, where he signed a 'Charter for a Joint National Action' as the first step on the road towards a union between the two countries; the visit was followed by intensive consultations in late 1978, designed to prepare the infrastructure of the projected integration.

This course of events was received in Moscow with mixed feelings. As a longtime advocate of a Syrian–Iraqi *rapprochement*, the USSR could not but support the newly attained reconciliation.³⁶ Yet at the same time they feared the escalatory potential of the Syrian–Iraqi move. Enabling Syria to face Israel on its own was one thing, but the Soviets were reluctant to provide the same sophisticated weapons systems to a more powerful Syrian–Iraqi union which might launch a military campaign or provoke Israel to risk a pre-emptive strike. Thus Shihabi was not the only one to be turned down by the Soviets; the Iraqi minister of defence, Adnan Khair-Allah returned empty-handed from Moscow in November 1978.

Syria responded vehemently to the Soviet change of heart. 'Maybe the Soviet Union now believes that it can achieve a strategic balance for Syria without providing the necessary weapons', commented the Syrian minister of information, Ahmad Iskandar Ahmad, but 'we believe otherwise . . . we are the only frontline state left and they [Israel] are choked with arms; so our demand for a strategic balance is a fair one'.³⁷ Therefore, he argued, the only criterion for befriending Syria could be the extent of support for its attempts to re-establish the regional strategic balance.³⁸ Syria's criticism was paralleled by concrete moves, aimed at demonstrating its irritation with the Soviet

behaviour: on 28 November 1978 the Syrian ambassador to Moscow, Jabr Kafri, was summoned to Damascus 'for consultations', and in December Asad reportedly called off a visit to Moscow which he was due to make together with Iraq's vice-president, Saddam Hussein.³⁹

Damascus's rage had little effect on Moscow. To be sure, in January 1979 the Soviets agreed to conclude a new arms deal with Syria,⁴⁰ and two months later Gromyko arrived in Damascus for a sudden visit. Yet none of these events came in deference to Syria; rather they were the outcome of a series of successive events which weakened both Syria's regional standing and the domestic position of the Asad regime. Already in early 1979 the Syrian–Iraqi honeymoon appeared to be succumbing to the acrimonious legacy between the two factions of the Ba'th regime: in June 1979 discussions on the nature of the projected merger ran into a dead alley, and a month later, on 28 July, the unbridgable gap between the two countries was publicly exposed when the new Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein, accused Syria of engineering a plot against him. The collapse of the talks with Iraq was especially worrisome for Damascus given the fact that, by March 1979, the Egyptian–Israeli negotiations had culminated in a peace treaty which virtually left Syria on its own *vis-à-vis* Israel.

Syria's external predicament was compounded by a mounting tide of violent opposition to the Asad regime, unprecedented in both scope and intensity. In early 1979, following a few months of relative domestic calm, Syria was rocked by a wave of terrorist activities, most notably the killing of 54 army cadets at the Aleppo artillery academy on 16 June 1979. Between June and September 1979, some 70 members of the ruling Alawi minority were assassinated, and by mid-1980 the death toll of political killings had amounted to some 300–400. The regime tried to contain the growing threat to its existence by resorting to a 'stick and carrot' strategy. Besides a ruthless campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood, the most dangerous oppositionary group, the authorities sought to mobilize public support by blaming Israel and the United States for Syria's domestic troubles, as well as by announcing political, administrative, judicial and economic reforms.

Syria's exacerbating domestic turbulence and deepening regional isolation appeared to have dispelled Moscow's reservations about rearming Damascus. With the need to consolidate the rejectionist camp stronger than ever following the conclusion of the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty, and the likelihood of a Syrian–Israeli conflagration

significantly reduced due to Syria's weakened position, the Soviets no longer saw reason to restrain Damascus. Moreover, the fast deterioration in Syrian-American relations during 1979, as the United States became the main scapegoat for Syria's domestic problems,⁴¹ gave the USSR further incentive to improve relations with its ally.

The first harbinger of Moscow's readiness to improve relations with Syria was given on 24 March 1979, a day after the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, in the form of a sudden visit by Gromyko to Damascus. Though the distinguished Soviet guest avoided any commitments to Syria in the military sphere (military aid was not mentioned in the joint communiqué), the tone of the official statement on the talks reflected a joint determination to 'broaden and strengthen the mutually beneficial and fruitful cooperation between the two countries, attaching paramount significance to the development of political relations'.⁴²

Gromyko's visit was followed by indications of Soviet readiness to enhance Syria's military potential. During the first half of 1979, for example, the Soviet media carried a number of references to the detrimental impact on the regional strategic balance of Egypt's 'betrayal' of the Arab cause. By deserting the Arab camp, it was argued, Egypt exposed Syria to Israeli 'tactics of intimidation', aimed at forcing Syria to give up its 'principled stand'. In these circumstances, it would be unrealistic to expect the USSR to remain an 'indifferent spectator' of Middle Eastern events.⁴³ The seriousness of this assertion was demonstrated in August 1979 by the arrival in Syria of the first consignment of T-72 tanks – the most advanced Soviet-made model.⁴⁴

But the real breakthrough in Soviet-Syrian procurement relations was accomplished in October 1979 during another visit by Asad to Moscow. Scheduled to take place in late June and postponed as a result of the turbulence in Syria, the visit was hailed by the Syrians as Asad's most important trip to the USSR until then. 'President Asad has paid a number of visits to the Soviet Union in the past', stated *Radio Damascus* on 15 October, 'however, this current visit equals in significance all previous visits combined, since its expected outcome will undoubtedly lead to drastic changes in the current Middle East equations':

Arab considerations with regard to this visit lie in freeing the region from the grip of the Camp David accords and bolstering Syria's defence capabilities in order to achieve a strategic balance,

in accordance with the provisions of the ninth Baghdad Summit, which have so far been mere theoretical equations in the general course of events. . . . Just as Israel has found in the United States an international power which supports its aggression . . . Syria and the other Arab states have found in the Soviet Union a friend which continuously supports their just and legitimate struggle against Zionist and imperialist powers.⁴⁵

This Syrian optimism was maintained throughout the visit, culminating eventually in overt satisfaction with the results of the talks. The best illustration of the Syrian sense of achievement was afforded by Asad in person, who defined his discussions as 'the most successful talks to be held with the Soviet leaders'.⁴⁶ This euphoria was fully justified. Apart from writing off \$500 million of Syria's military and economic debts and signing generous economic and technological agreements,⁴⁷ the two parties concluded their largest arms deal until then, thus opening a new qualitative stage in Syria's military build-up.

Although the visit did not produce the long-speculated bilateral treaty – interestingly enough, there is no evidence that the issue was raised at all during the talks⁴⁸ – Syria's behaviour in the aftermath of Asad's trip, in particular the staunch support for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, revealed a willingness for stronger identification with the Soviet cause. Not only did Syria abstain, alongside the other members of the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation, from joining the overwhelming majority of the UN General Assembly in denouncing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan,⁴⁹ but Syrian diplomats at the UN were reported to have lobbied on behalf of the USSR prior to the vote.⁵⁰ Moreover, Syria quickly established itself as the leader of the camp supporting the Soviet action. On 16 January, two days after the UN condemnation of the Soviet invasion, the foreign ministers of the Front convened in Damascus, where they issued a joint statement denouncing criticism of the USSR as an 'uproar fabricated by world imperialism', and called upon the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) to postpone its emergency session, scheduled for 26 January 'to a later date', as well as to remove the projected venue from Islamabad, Pakistan, to Saudi Arabia. The foreign ministers also suggested widening the ICO agenda beyond the Afghanistan question to include the issue of the Arab–Israeli conflict, on the one hand, and American military threats to the Middle East, on the other.

Despite the ICO's willingness to widen the agenda of the forthcoming conference to include the issues of Palestine and Jerusalem, as well as to postpone the opening of the sessions by one day, Syria – unlike Algeria, Libya and the PLO – decided not to send delegates to Islamabad. Furthermore, by way of demonstrating its resentment of the anti-Soviet campaign, Syria invited the Soviet foreign minister to Damascus on 27–29 January, to coincide with the Islamic Conference. Thus, when the Conference came out with a call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Syria and the USSR issued a joint communiqué condemning 'the continuing campaign of the imperialist forces, headed by the United States, which are exhibiting false concern for Islam while at the same time supporting the seizure by Israel of Islamic temples in Jerusalem':

Under the cover of an artificially whipped up hullabaloo around the events in Iran and Afghanistan, the imperialist circles and their accomplices are striving to divert the attention of the Arab peoples away from the struggle for eliminating the consequences of Israeli aggression, to split the ranks of the Muslim and Arab countries, to drive a wedge between them and their friends, namely the Soviet Union and the countries of community, and to undermine the unity and principles of the nonaligned movement . . . the sides stated the need to respect the will of Afghanistan to defend its land, territorial integrity and the policy of nonalignment.⁵¹

Syria's unequivocal support for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was not an isolated episode; rather it reflected a steady drive towards a closer alliance with Moscow which was to gain momentum in the following months. Unable to quell the domestic restiveness, which by the spring of 1980 had turned into widespread, coordinated disturbances in northern and central Syria, and faced with a growing regional isolation, in early 1980 Asad apparently decided to throw his lot with the USSR. With Syrian forces bogged down in Lebanon in a futile strife against the Christian Maronite militias backed by Israel; with Iraq distinctly hostile, Jordan supporting the Muslim Brotherhood in its struggle against the Syrian regime, and relations with the PLO in a state of turmoil, Syria's sense of vulnerability rose sharply. Together with the Israeli threat, which at the time loomed greater than ever before, and the inherent weakness and growing fragmentation of the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation, these factors

explain Asad's anxiety to seek refuge in a closer relationship with the USSR.

In a policy statement, issued on 18 February 1980, the Syrian government declared its intention to 'continue to strengthen the ties of friendship and cooperation with the socialist-bloc countries, headed by the USSR'.⁵² A month later, the Syrian premier, Abd al-Rauf Kasim, openly alluded to the possibility of signing a bilateral treaty with the USSR, 'should the United States escalate its aggression' against Syria.⁵³ If there remained any doubts regarding Syria's willingness to conclude a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the Soviet Union, they were completely dispelled by Asad, who, in a policy speech on 23 April, revealed that a decision on raising Soviet-Syrian relations to a 'higher and advanced level', had already been taken, in accordance with 'the interest of our nation and in fulfillment of our aspirations, cause and morals'.⁵⁴

The imminence of the treaty was also illustrated by Syria's industrious efforts to prepare the Arab world for such an eventuality. Fully aware of potential opposition to the formalization of Syrian-Soviet relations, mainly but not solely, among the conservative Arab regimes, Damascus launched an intensive propaganda campaign aimed at highlighting the possible advantages of such a move and belittling its negative ramifications. Accordingly, the treaty was presented as the natural response to the separate Egyptian-Israeli deal, a necessary – in fact an unavoidable – step to redress the strategic balance, upset by Egypt's desertion from the Arab ranks. In Khaddam's words:

We have no choice. Our status is different from that prevailing in Mauritania or Morocco or Yemen. Israel is 60 kms from Damascus. This distance is insignificant within the means of modern war. . . . It is, therefore, incumbent on us to embark on creating new qualitative factors bound to expand our own umbrella . . . we are thinking of means that will develop our relations with the USSR on a qualitative level, according to which the Soviets will give us as much as the United States is giving Israel.⁵⁵

At the same time, and in order to allay Arab apprehensions of increased Soviet influence and presence in the Middle East following the signing of a bilateral treaty, Syrian spokesmen emphasized time and again that the treaty would neither subordinate Syrian foreign policy to Soviet interests nor would it compromise Syria's policy of

nonalignment. It is not in the Syrian intention to form an axis with the Soviet Union, argued Premier Kasim, 'since Syria does not believe in any axis. It is a nonaligned state . . . and the Soviet Union has accepted our policy of nonalignment'.⁵⁶

In these circumstances, there was no reason to avoid a bilateral treaty, and, indeed, the implementation of Syria's decision to upgrade its relations with the USSR to a 'higher qualitative level' was swift and determined: amidst a growing number of references, by both leading government officials and the state-controlled media, to the consolidation of Soviet-Syrian relations,⁵⁷ some ten visits were exchanged between Damascus and Moscow from April to October 1980. In mid-May Khaddam hinted that discussions on upgrading bilateral relations were already underway, and in August the 13th National Congress of the Ba'th Party gave formal sanction to the intention to develop further Soviet-Syrian ties.⁵⁸ On 8 October 1980, Asad travelled to Moscow where he concluded the long-speculated Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the USSR.

8 From Crisis to War

In the two years from the signing of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty to the death of the ailing Brezhnev in November 1982, the newly attained agreement – in fact, the entire delicate web of Soviet–Syrian relations – was subjected to repeated tests. Tensions, crises and ultimately war made it imperative for Moscow to tread cautiously between the need to harness the treaty for Syria's security and the reluctance to be drawn into too great a commitment.

Indeed, it was not long before this dilemma was to give rise to conflicting interpretations of Soviet military and strategic obligations towards Syria. Whereas the Syrians depicted the treaty as embodying a far-reaching Soviet undertaking to redress the strategic imbalance caused by Egypt's desertion of the Arab camp, by ensuring that 'any aggression to which Syria will be exposed will not be faced by Syria separately',¹ the Soviets sought to downplay the extent of their commitment by highlighting the international, rather than the bilateral, ramifications of the treaty.² Whilst Syria viewed the provision for consultations and cooperation as a means to harness Soviet support for its foreign policy ventures, the Soviet Union regarded this stipulation as a useful mechanism for tension reduction and crisis management.

As early as October 1980, during Asad's visit to Moscow, Brezhnev hinted that dramatic changes in the nature of Soviet wartime commitment to Syria should not be expected to follow from the bilateral treaty. 'The task of the Soviet–Syrian treaty', he said, 'is to help improve the situation in the Near East and establish there a real and just peace. This treaty has no other objectives and it is not directed against third countries. *This is a treaty in the name of peace, not in the name of war*'.³ Similarly, the Soviet media vehemently denied reports in the Western and Arabic press about the existence of secret clauses in the bilateral treaty, allegedly establishing new and higher limits for Soviet wartime support for Syria.⁴

That the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty implied neither automatic and unconditional Soviet support for every Syrian move, nor a more binding commitment to Syria's security beyond the already established pattern, became evident from Moscow's behaviour in a series of crises which embroiled Syria during the late Brezhnev years. Having no role in the initiation of any of these crises, the Soviets

chose to adhere to their own interpretation of the treaty, using it as a restraint rather than as a catalyst, as both an umbrella for coordination and a channel through which to influence Syria. The first clear sign of Moscow's restrictive interpretation of the bilateral treaty came within two months of its conclusion, when the Soviets refrained from siding with Syria in its open feud with Jordan.

THE SYRIAN-JORDANIAN CRISIS

On 25 November 1980, allegedly in response to Jordan's continued aid to the Muslim Brotherhood (which organized violent resistance to the Asad regime), Syrian armoured units were deployed along the common border with Jordan, thus bringing relations between the two countries to their lowest ebb since September 1970.

The Syrian move was not completely unpredictable. The three years following Sadat's Jerusalem visit witnessed the gradual disintegration of the Syrian-Jordanian partnership of the mid-1970s, as Syria became increasingly suspicious of King Hussein's intention to join the peace process. Damascus's wariness became especially acute from mid-1979 onwards, when the collapse of the brief Syrian-Iraqi *rapprochement* combined with the mounting domestic opposition to the Asad regime to improve Jordan's manoeuvrability in the Arab sphere. With the spectre of Syrian power looming less menacing than ever, Jordan not only drew closer to Iraq – Syria's perennial rival – and explored the possibility of integrating within a US-sponsored settlement, but also began to extend considerable support to Asad's opponents by allowing some underground groups to operate from Jordanian territory. The already strained relations between the two countries deteriorated further following the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980, when Jordan sided with Iraq while Syria chose to throw its lot with Iran. In late November 1980 the members of the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation joined Syria in boycotting an Arab summit conference in Amman which came out in support for Iraq; and while the Arab delegations were still deliberating in Amman, Jordan and Syria found themselves on the verge of an armed confrontation following the deployment of Syrian troops on the common border.

The unfolding crisis was viewed by Moscow with great concern. Coming in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Iran, the Syrian-Jordanian escalation threatened to create another hotbed of tension

in the Middle East, thereby diverting Arab attention from the separate Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty and, in consequence, eroding the unity of the fragile anti-Sadat coalition. In addition, Syria's pressures on Jordan checked the steady warming of Soviet–Jordanian relations, bringing the United States and Jordan together again after a period of chill following the Camp David accords. Thus, in response to the Syrian action, King Hussein postponed his long-awaited trip to Moscow (which eventually took place in May 1981), while at the same time approaching Washington for military support. Although this development was not necessarily negative for Syria, which must have regarded the worsening of Soviet–Jordanian relations as improving its own bargaining position, the Soviets were obviously dissatisfied with this possible narrowing of their regional options. Last, and perhaps most important, was Moscow's fear that the crisis would lead to open hostilities, resulting in an Israeli intervention and the need for Soviet interference in yet another Middle Eastern war.

Given these considerations, the USSR did its best to contain the crisis. Not only did it forgo any public endorsement of the Syrian position, but the low-key coverage of the crisis in the Soviet media reflected Moscow's displeasure with the deterioration of Syrian–Jordanian relations.⁵ This public dismay was paralleled by concrete attempts to temper the Syrian bellicosity. First, like their conduct during the Jordanian–Syrian encounter of September 1970, the Soviets quickly distanced themselves from the Syrian action by withdrawing their advisers from the units deployed along the border and by informing the US administration to this effect. Second, on 2 December the Soviet First Vice-President and Alternate Member of the Politburo, Vasily Kuznetsov, arrived in Damascus for consultations. Although the official purpose of the visit was to exchange the ratification documents of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, the seniority of the Soviet guest indicates that Moscow had additional reasons in mind for dispatching Kuznetsov. Indeed, apart from carrying out his ceremonial obligations Kuznetsov held several meetings with the Syrian leadership (i.e. Asad, Kasim and Khaddam) to discuss 'some topical international questions of mutual concern, including . . . the current situation, the new developments in the area'.

To judge from the overall tone of Kuznetsov's public pronouncements, which laid a heavy emphasis on the peaceful aims of the bilateral treaty, there is little doubt that the Soviet official requested his Syrian hosts to exert the utmost restraint. 'The main strength of

the Arabs lies in their unity', he stated in a thinly veiled hint, and 'this is precisely why the imperialist forces are striving to sow divisions, to exacerbate relations between the Arab countries and to create hotbeds of conflict'. The only way to avoid playing into the hands of imperialism, therefore, ran through the peaceful settlement of inter-Arab problems, and it was exactly this goal which the Soviet-Syrian treaty sought to promote by creating a powerful instrument for 'eliminating the hotbeds of dangerous tension in the Near East'.⁶

Although it is by no means clear whether Asad entertained any intentions of attacking Jordan, the fact that Syria's move was met by chill on the part of its main international ally, and furthermore that Moscow exploited the new treaty as a means to constrain Syrian policy, appears to have severely limited Damascus's manoeuvrability. By emphasizing the peaceful nature of the treaty at the peak of the crisis, the USSR prevented Syria from sheltering behind the treaty, thereby considerably weakening Damascus's bargaining position *vis-à-vis* Amman. Indeed, during the entire period of tension (25 November–10 December) Syria refrained from any public reference to the bilateral treaty. However, as things turned out, this highly circumspect Soviet behaviour remained a rather isolated episode in Soviet-Syrian relations – as the 'missile crisis' of May 1981 made clear. On that occasion, while still anxious to downplay the treaty and employ it as a coordination mechanism for crisis containment, the USSR did not fail to indicate, in the most unequivocal way, where its sympathy lay.

THE SOVIETS AND THE MISSILE CRISIS

On 28 April 1981, in response to ostensibly desperate pleas for support by the Christian Phalanges militia, Israel attempted to pressure Damascus to loosen its siege of the Christian town of Zahla in the Beq'a valley by downing two Syrian transport helicopters which were on a supply mission in Mount Sanin. Syria reacted within less than 24 hours by moving mobile SA-6 surface-to-air missile batteries into Lebanon and deploying them near Zahla, in positions prepared a few weeks earlier.⁷ Viewing this as a gross violation of the Syrian-Israeli unwritten rules of the game in Lebanon, which could severely constrain Israel's aerial activity over that country, Premier Menachem Begin instructed the Israeli air force on 30 April to destroy the newly

deployed missiles. When this plan was held up by bad weather conditions, the issue developed into an open confrontation, with Begin pledging to destroy the missiles unless they were removed from Lebanon and Asad adamantly rejecting his demand. This public squabbling was accompanied by a series of military actions which brought the two countries closer to war than at any time since 1974. These included partial mobilization of reserve forces by both sides, deployment of additional Syrian surface-to-air missiles in Lebanon and along the Syrian–Lebanese border, reinforcement of the Syrian forces in the Beq’a and, finally, employment of anti-aircraft fire against Israeli aircraft flying over Lebanon.

Although it endangered the delicate Syrian–Israeli *modus vivendi* in Lebanon, the gathering storm over this country posed less of a problem to the Soviet Union than the Syrian–Jordanian border tension of November 1980. Not only was Moscow spared the dilemma of having to choose between two Arab protagonists, but the crisis turned out to be a major obstacle to America’s attempts to forge a regional anti-Soviet bloc: by illustrating the salience of the Arab–Israeli conflict, the ‘missile crisis’ both diverted Arab attention from the ‘Soviet threat’ which US diplomacy was seeking to magnify at the time, and forced the conservative Arab regimes to rally, albeit reluctantly, behind Syria. Moreover, as the US became increasingly identified with Israel during the crisis, the USSR had good reasons to anticipate an improvement in its regional standing, provided, of course, that events did not get out of control. Thus the Soviets chose not to cooperate with their rival superpower, but rather to try to defuse the conflict on their own through the coordination mechanism offered by the Soviet–Syrian treaty. This, in turn, meant that difficult choices had to be made between several conflicting factors: between the obligation to back Syria’s position and the urgent need to contain the crisis; between the desire to frustrate US mediation efforts and the wish to benefit from them, at least through the restraining of Israel.

From the very outset of the missile crisis, the USSR sought to discredit America’s suitability to play the role of impartial mediator between Israel and Syria. ‘It is highly significant that the US leaders are by no means preparing to make the high-handed Israeli aggressors see reason’, argued TASS on 5 May, as the special American envoy to the Middle East, Philip Habib, was preparing to leave for the region:

they openly support Tel Aviv's ultimatum, but before giving the 'green light' to Israel to carry out a strike on Lebanon, they would like to have more time for 'diplomatic efforts', with the help of which it is intended to force the Lebanese side to accept Tel Aviv's conditions and to impose on the Lebanese people US-Israeli diktat.

The American attempt to twist Syria's arm, the Soviets believed, was even more deplorable given the fact that the removal of the Syrian missiles would mean the 'virtual disarmament of the national patriotic forces and the joint Arab peacekeeping forces in Lebanon'; and since the Arab deterrent force had been introduced into Lebanon at the request of the lawful Lebanese government to ensure peace and security, its weakening would necessarily destabilize the situation there. Syria's firm stand in the face of the Israeli and American threats could not, therefore, be considered a catalyst to war. On the contrary, it is a 'purely defensive measure . . . [which] cannot threaten Israel's security in any way' and which aims to 'secure [Syrian] lands occupied in 1967, and to establish a just peace in the Middle East'. In other words, by adhering to its position in Lebanon, Syria was not merely pursuing its own national interest, but, rather, was acting as the 'main bulwark' of the progressive Arab camp, thereby deserving the maximum support of the Arab countries.⁸

This verbal support was accompanied by a series of political, military and even economic moves, designed to demonstrate the extent of Soviet backing for Syria. On 6 May, the Soviet first deputy foreign minister, Georgy Kornienko, arrived in Damascus for a three-day visit, presented by the two parties as coming within the framework of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.⁹ The exchange of several high-ranking political and military delegations accounts for the close coordination of Soviet-Syrian positions during the crisis; these included the visits of the Soviet chief-of-staff, Nikolai Ogarkov, and the Syrian minister of defence, Mustafa Tlas, to Damascus and Moscow respectively and, according to some sources, a 24-hour trip by Asad himself to Moscow.¹⁰

In addition, and by way of counterbalancing the American naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean, the Soviets augmented their Mediterranean squadron to its highest level in some four years and deployed a naval task force – reportedly including the helicopter carrier, *Moskva* – off the Lebanese coast.¹¹ Another demonstration

of support, albeit of an indirect nature, was the signing of a Soviet–Syrian agreement on economic and technical cooperation on 14 May, as well as the two countries' pronounced intention to boost bilateral trade by 150 per cent in 1981–5.¹²

Last but not least, the USSR rapidly increased its military support for Syria in early July when the essentially abated crisis appeared to be rekindling, following renewed threats by the re-elected Menachem Begin to destroy the Syrian missiles. The new Soviet measures included the acceleration of arms supplies by a special airlift and, more significantly, the staging of a joint Soviet–Syrian amphibious exercise on 6–7 July 1981.¹³

These strong demonstrations of support notwithstanding, the USSR did not fail to indicate to all parties involved its clear interest in de-escalation. Already during Kornienko's visit to Damascus, the Syrians were informed of Moscow's reluctance to see the crisis escalating into an open conflagration,¹⁴ and this position found a clear echo in Soviet statements which, while voicing strong support for Syria and condemning the United States and Israel, warned against the danger of the situation worsening, and revealed that the USSR was making an utmost effort to achieve a peaceful resolution to the crisis.¹⁵ On 22 May, the missile crisis was referred to by Leonid Brezhnev in person. Speaking at Tbilisi, on the 60th anniversary of Soviet power in Georgia, the Soviet leader displayed deep anxiety over the Lebanese tragedy, which, in his words, took place in close proximity to the USSR's southern borders. 'One rash move', he warned, 'and the flames of war could envelop the entire Near East, and one cannot know how far the sparks of the fire could fly'.¹⁶

The only way to eliminate this threat to international peace, in Brezhnev's view, was to convene an international conference on the Near East along the principles outlined at the 26th CPSU Congress three months earlier. The immediate American rejection of his proposal did not dissuade Brezhnev from reiterating his appeal a few days later, during a visit by King Hussein to Moscow, this time with a better measure of success, as the Jordanian King, one of Washington's most prominent Middle Eastern allies, joined the Soviets in the call for an international conference. The fact that Brezhnev's references to the crisis failed to contain any allusion to the Soviet–Syrian bilateral treaty only served to illustrate an important aspect of Moscow's behaviour: namely, the attempt to play down both Soviet military engagement in the crisis and the relatedness of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty to the situation in Lebanon. Thus, while

occasionally implying recognition of the unique strategic significance of the Beq'a for Syrian security,¹⁷ the Soviet media repudiated as 'an obvious lie' Israeli radio reports that referred to the Soviet ambassador to Lebanon, Alexander Soldatov, as having stated that any military intervention in the Beq'a would prompt the USSR to study the question of increasing military aid to Syria.¹⁸ Above all, Damascus's claim that 'Syria has succeeded in mobilizing all the positive elements, particularly the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR, in support of its decisions and political and military moves,'¹⁹ was preceded by a Soviet assertion that 'the recent developments [in Lebanon] are unrelated to the Soviet-Syrian treaty'.²⁰ Moscow also vehemently – and justifiably – rejected Begin's allegations about the existence of Soviet advisers with the Syrian forces in Lebanon.²¹

Soviet defensiveness was targeted not only at Damascus, but also at Jerusalem, which, they believed, held the key to the escalation or de-escalation of the crisis. Although it lacked both direct influence over Israel's policy and insight into the Israeli decision-making process (diplomatic relations had been severed in 1967), the USSR was anxious to prevent a sudden action against Syria; it therefore took care to alleviate fears in Jerusalem of a Soviet-backed Syrian aggression. Hence the relative restraint of Soviet attacks on Israel compared with those on the United States; hence Brezhnev's unexpected announcement, at the height of the crisis, of the USSR's interest in improving relations with Israel. 'We . . . want good relations with all countries in the . . . Middle East', he stated in a dinner on 26 May in honour of King Hussein,

this concerns those with whom we already have friendship and mutual understanding and those with whom relations have not been developed fully or are so far non-existent. This also concerns Israel, if, naturally, it abandons the policy of seizing other peoples' lands and follows a peaceful, rather than aggressive policy.²²

Interestingly enough, this open, if qualified, Soviet gesture towards Israel met with tacit approval from Damascus, thereby underlining a common Syrian-Soviet interest in containing the crisis. For in no way did Asad's readiness to challenge Israel in Lebanon imply a willingness to risk an armed clash. Rather, it resulted from a combination of Syria's reluctance to see the strategically located town of Zahla taken over by the Israeli-backed Phalanges militia, and Asad's growing

self-confidence following the (temporary) lull in domestic opposition to his regime. And since Asad believed Syria's military power to be still inferior to Israel's, he knew that the crisis could serve Syrian interests only as long as it did not slide into open hostilities.²³

Consequently, while voicing its determination to face Israeli aggression at all costs, Syria took much care to emphasize the legitimate and defensive nature of its military presence in Lebanon, and avoided any abrupt move that could provide Israel with a pretext to escalate. Thus, for example, Damascus failed to respond to the renewal of Israeli air-strikes against PLO concentrations in Southern Lebanon on 28 May, nor did it play any (known) role during the heavy Palestinian-Israeli squabbling of 10–24 July, despite the proximity of this fighting to Syrian units. Similarly, in late June the Syrians removed the major cause of the crisis by agreeing to lift the siege on Zahla in return for the withdrawal of the Phalangist militiamen from the town and their replacement by Lebanese security forces.

The Syrian circumspection proved to be highly rewarding. As the risk of conflagration subsided following the shift of Israeli attention to other issues, particularly the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor on 7 June and the confrontation with the PLO in southern Lebanon, Syria emerged from the 'missile crisis' as the undisputable winner. Through its open challenge of Israel, Syria managed to appear as the bastion of the Arab cause, stepping out – however temporarily – from its regional isolation. On 22 May 1981, a conference of the Arab foreign ministers convened in Tunis at the request of Algeria and the PLO and promised Syria all the necessary financial and military support to face the 'Israeli aggression'. No less important was Syria's success in changing the rules of the 'Lebanese game' in its favour without incurring any retaliation. By leaving the missiles in Lebanon, Syria not only reaped a propaganda victory and imposed severe constraints on the Israeli air force's operational capabilities, but also improved its standing in the intra-Lebanese conflict.

In these circumstances, and despite its differences with the USSR on the relative relevance of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty to the crisis, Damascus did not fail to praise Moscow's 'clear and firm stand', which, in its view, had helped to prevent an Israeli aggression.²⁴ Thus, according to Asad, 'the Soviet Union supports us against aggression. It is convinced that aggression is being committed against us. For this reason it supports us, aids us politically and supplies us'.²⁵ And the Syrian minister of state for foreign affairs,

Farouq al-Shara, went a step further in depicting Soviet aid. 'Syria has tremendous Soviet support', he stated in an interview with the London-based Arab journal, *al-Majalah*, 'especially in that the Soviets will certainly not allow Syria to be defeated militarily'.²⁶

PRELUDE TO WAR

If Soviet support during the missile crisis had been viewed by Syria as highly satisfactory, the rapidly changing circumstances of the Arab–Israeli conflict were soon to restore Syria's sense of vulnerability, driving it to demand more visible proofs of the USSR's determination 'not to allow Syria to be defeated militarily'. In September 1981 Menachem Begin went to Washington, where he managed to extract an American promise to sign a bilateral agreement on strategic cooperation; the actual conclusion of the agreement, known as the Memorandum of Strategic Understanding, took place on 30 November, during a visit to the United States by the Israeli minister of defence, Ariel Sharon.

The Israeli–American memorandum was received by Syria with considerable alarm. 'To confirm its hostility to the Arabs, the United States has entered into a strategic alliance with Israel, which includes its obligation to defend "Israeli security" against forces hostile to Israel', argued *al-Ba'th* on 13 September, and 'since the Arab nation is the major and only party in conflict with the Zionist entity, the US pledge therefore means a declaration of war on the Arabs'. As the Soviet–Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation – being a purely defensive agreement – could not match the American–Israeli 'treaty of aggression',²⁷ there was now a pressing need for a 'qualitative leap in Soviet–Syrian relations'.²⁸

By way of achieving this 'qualitative leap', a high-ranking Syrian delegation, headed by Mustafa Tlas, landed in Moscow in mid-September, only to be bitterly disappointed. Though obviously satisfied with the fresh eruption of anti-American sentiment following the conclusion of the memorandum, and eager to exploit this development to further discredit America's regional role, the Soviets turned a deaf ear both to Tlas's request to elevate the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty to a strategic alliance and to his pleas for increased supplies of sophisticated weaponry.²⁹ Moreover, on 25 September, four days before meeting Abd al-Khalim Khaddam at the UN General Assembly, Andrei Gromyko conferred with his Israeli

counterpart, Yitzhak Shamir, in New York, in an attempt to convince Israel to support the Soviet effort to convene an international conference on the Middle East.³⁰

The Gromyko-Shamir meeting, the first of its kind in six years, underlined yet again two interrelated aspects of Soviet Middle East policy, namely, Moscow's interest in mending the fences with Jerusalem, and its greater political leverage over Damascus. For one, the Soviets were fully aware of the damage caused to their Middle Eastern standing by the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967. As long as such relations existed, the Soviet Union could exploit them to its own advantage, warming or cooling them in accordance with the requirements of the moment; the very threat of cutting diplomatic ties could in itself be used both to pressure Israel, and to gain real concessions from the Arab states. Once these relations were broken, the Soviet Union was deprived of such policy options.

The USSR's anxiety to thaw bilateral relations with Jerusalem, which had driven Brezhnev to make his unusual gesture to Israel at the height of the missile crisis, was significantly enhanced following the formation of the second Begin government, with the belligerent Ariel Sharon in the key position of minister of defence. Viewing this government as a 'government of war', and aware of the limits of US leverage over Israel (depicted *inter alia* by the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in June 1981), the Soviets sought to establish direct channels of communication with Jerusalem in order to reduce the risks attending the newly attained strategic memorandum.

On the other hand, Moscow's ability to court Israel at the time when it was turning down desperate Syrian requests for closer alignment and increased military support demonstrated the fundamental improvement in the Soviet bargaining position *vis-à-vis* Damascus, dating back to the Egyptian-Israeli peace process of late 1977. The Shamir-Gromyko meeting thus constituted an unmistakable reminder to Syria that the ultimate say regarding the nature of the response to the new American-Israeli challenge lay with Moscow.

If there remained any doubts about Moscow's determination not to be swept by the tide of events in the direction of a defence pact with Syria, they were completely dispelled by the Soviet reaction to the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights on 14 December 1981. Unlike Syria, which viewed the Israeli action as a public humiliation and a fundamental setback, the Soviet Union saw gains as well as losses in this latest development. In the first place, Damascus's

heightened sense of insecurity following the Israeli action strengthened the USSR's bargaining position *vis-à-vis* Syria. Second, the extension of Israeli jurisdiction and law to the Golan Heights came at the same time as the imposition of martial law in Poland. This, in turn, provided the Soviets with the opportunity to divert world public opinion from the events in Poland by unleashing a fresh propaganda campaign against the United States, which, so they said, bore the major responsibility for the Israeli move.³¹ The fact that the United States responded to the annexation of the Golan Heights by suspending the Memorandum of Strategic Understanding, as well as by imposing a partial arms embargo on Israel, did nothing to alleviate the intensity of Soviet attacks on the United States.

The USSR did not, of course, rejoice in the temporary *rapprochement* between the United States and Syria, as Damascus expressed its satisfaction with the American support for the UN Security Council Resolution 497 of 17 December 1981, which deplored the Israeli annexation and called upon Israel to nullify its decision.³² But since this warming of relations turned out to be a very brief episode (in late January 1982 the United States vetoed a follow-up Security Council resolution on sanctions against Israel, and, in consequence, Syria resumed its harsh attacks on America's Middle East policy), the Soviets did not find it difficult to brush aside renewed Syrian requests for a defence pact made during Khaddam's visit to Moscow on 14–15 January 1982.³³ And as if to signal to Damascus the advantages of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty so as to forestall future requests for a defence pact, the Soviets chose to stress the importance of this treaty to Syrian security.

In contrast with the missile crisis when Damascus had gained the upper hand, Syria's inability to find an adequate response to the annexation of the Golan Heights unequivocally exposed its inherent weakness *vis-à-vis* Israel. Since the United States had blocked the imposition of UN sanctions on Israel, Syria was left with only one option that would restore its dignity – the conclusion of a defence pact with the USSR.

Another hypothetical alternative – resort to arms – was out of the question given Syria's military inferiority to Israel. Indeed, despite defining the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights as a 'declaration of war on Syria and cancellation of the 1973 ceasefire' and threatening to 'reserve the right to adopt the appropriate measures to cope with this blatant violation of the UN Charter resolutions, including Resolution 338',³⁴ Syria took great care to clarify that it still abided

by the provisions of the May 1974 disengagement agreement with Israel.³⁵ Moreover, in February 1982 Asad delivered a message to Israel through an informal channel he often used – Radio Monte Carlo's Damascus correspondent, Louis Farres – in which he expressed Syria's reluctance to clash militarily with Israel in Lebanon, and informed the Israeli leadership of Syria's 'threshold of tolerance' regarding a possible Israeli intervention in that country. 'If the Israeli intervention takes the form of strikes against Palestinian positions and camps in Lebanon', read the note, 'Syria's intervention will remain limited'. However,

If it is a matter of occupation, Syria will certainly give the Palestinians and the Lebanese patriotic forces all the means necessary for checking the occupation and turning the occupiers' life into an unbearable hell, and this in addition to conducting the battles that will be called for in a time of need. It is no secret that Israel's military force is now larger than Syria's; therefore the possibility of Syria's turning to a full scale war at a time and place determined by Israel should be excluded . . . the activity will be limited to resistance to the occupation and to the attrition of the occupying forces . . . but might develop in an all-out war if circumstances so determined.³⁶

Paradoxically, this message played into the hands of the Israeli minister of defence, Ariel Sharon, by providing him with proof that his plan for a large-scale campaign against the Palestinian forces in Lebanon would not lead to a Syrian-Israeli confrontation. Whether and to what extent Sharon did use the Syrian message as a means to overcome opposition to his plan is difficult to assess. It is clear, however, that the Syrian communication did nothing to deter Israel. On 6 June 1982, Israeli forces crossed the Lebanese border in strength, thereby putting the Soviet-Syrian bilateral treaty to its most severe test ever.

WAR OVER LEBANON

Neither the USSR nor Syria were wholly taken by surprise by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Given Israel's long-standing resistance to any form of direct Syrian military presence in Lebanon, Syria's growing interference in the Lebanese crisis from late 1975 onwards

could not but contain the seeds of an armed confrontation between the two countries. Yet, since Israel and Syria found themselves in the same boat, with both reluctant to see a leftist-Palestinian victory, a tacit agreement was reached as early as 1976 regarding the 'rules of the game' in Lebanon. These rules were maintained, by and large, despite the fact that in 1977 Syria resumed its support for the PLO and turned against the Christian camp. Within this framework, Syria remained aloof at the time of the massive Israeli operation against the Palestinian forces in south Lebanon ('Operation Litani') in March 1978, thereby exposing itself to severe criticism from its opponents in the Arab world, particularly Iraq. Similarly, the air clashes between Syrian and Israeli aircraft over Lebanon in June and September 1979 did not result in a breakdown of the *modus vivendi* between these two arch-enemies.

This situation began to change in late 1980, when Begin, motivated by deep feelings of empathy towards the 'oppressed' Christian minority in Lebanon, promised the Phalangists that Israel would guarantee the security of the Lebanese Christian community. Encouraged by this far-reaching pledge, which included the provision of an Israeli aerial umbrella in case of Syrian air strikes against the Phalangist forces, the leader of the Christian militia, Bashir Gumayel, escalated his activities against the Syrian forces in Lebanon. By April 1981 the Phalangists' provocations had resulted in Syria's laying siege to Zahla; from that time on the road to the missile crisis, which brought Israel and Syria close to war, was short. Nor did the abating of the crisis in June 1981 eliminate the danger of war. With Begin still committed to the destruction of the surface-to-air missiles in Lebanon, and Defence Minister Sharon determined to overwhelm the Syrian forces in Lebanon during his envisaged campaign against the Palestinians – despite his public claims to the contrary³⁷ – the spectre of the Syrian-Israeli confrontation in Lebanon loomed large.

The escalation did not escape the Soviets' notice. As noted earlier, Moscow viewed Begin's second government as a 'government of war' which would sooner or later attack the Palestinian organizations in Lebanon; hence, from late 1981 onwards the Soviet media repeatedly warned of Israel's intention to strike at Lebanon, intensifying these cautions during the winter of 1981 and the spring of 1982. On 1 March 1982, for example, a TASS commentary argued that the US defence secretary, Caspar Weinberger, 'practically gave the "green light" to Israeli intervention in Lebanon', and on 14 April *Izvestiya* accused Israel not only of unleashing 'bloody terror against the

Palestinians on the West Bank and in the Gaza strip', but also of 'preparing to crush Lebanon with its mailed fist' in order to 'strip the Palestinian people of their national rights' and to bring about their 'physical annihilation'. An official *TASS* statement, issued a week later in response to Israeli air strikes against the PLO was no less strident:

Committing one act of aggression after another, Israel is openly challenging the peace-loving states, cynically demonstrating that its foreign policy is directed at the seizure of the lands of others. . . . The Israeli air raid against Lebanon is strongly condemned by the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union believes that the UN Security Council should, at long last, adopt effective measures to call the high-handed aggressor to order.³⁸

Moreover, once war broke out, the Soviets were quick to dismiss Israel's official justification of its invasion and to point perceptively to the real motive behind it. 'Begin indicated that the Israeli army has been ordered to push the Palestinians 25 miles from the border', wrote *Izvestiya's* political commentator, Alexander Bovin, but in fact, he argued, Israel had other, more far-reaching aims:

Tel Aviv's first aim is to destroy the military infrastructure of the PLO, smash its military formation and thereby greatly weaken its role and significance. According to Tel Aviv's schemes this should prepare the ground for the second stage of the Camp David process. It is estimated that, on the one hand, a weakened and intimidated Lebanon will agree to conclude a separate agreement with Israel along the lines of the Camp David set-up while, on the other hand, the weakening of the PLO should push Jordan into joining the Camp David process. . . . Secondly, Tel Aviv is quite obviously pursuing the aim of forcing Syria out of Lebanon and thus increasing its isolation.³⁹

It is exactly this keen awareness of Israeli intentions which has left many observers of Soviet Middle East policy perplexed, if not disappointed, with the level of Soviet engagement in the 1982 Lebanon War. 'The Soviet Union may have some questions to answer from its friends and allies in the Middle East at the close of the current crisis in Lebanon', wrote one commentator. 'Given the massive material and political support Moscow had accorded both Syria and the

Palestinian Liberation Organization in the past, it is possible that they, or at least groups among their supporters and the public at large, expected something more than the virtual inaction of the Soviet Union'.⁴⁰ Extending this line of reasoning, many explanations were offered for Moscow's 'virtual inaction'; these ranged from logistical difficulties in the provision of military support to a succession crisis in the Soviet leadership, to external considerations and constraints, such as the crises in Poland and Afghanistan, and strategic arms negotiations.⁴¹

While giving a fairly accurate account of Moscow's support for the PLO, these views do a great injustice to Soviet behaviour towards Syria. For both during the period of active fighting between Israel and Syria (6–25 June 1982), and certainly in its aftermath, Moscow extended the same military and political support to Damascus as it had done in previous Arab–Israeli wars. It has been shown in Chapter 2 that Soviet military support for Syria during the Lebanon War consisted of the same ingredients as before (i.e. arms shipments, advisory assistance, a naval show of force, alerting of airborne units in the USSR), and *fully satisfied Syria's operational needs*.⁴²

In the political sphere, the Soviets aimed at mobilizing the widest possible support for the Arab cause and bringing the maximum pressure to bear upon Israel. A major arena for Soviet activity was the United Nations, where the USSR laboriously sought to arrange a Security Council resolution that would contain the Israeli campaign. The subsequent American vetoes on such resolutions were presented by the Soviets as a proof of US–Israeli collusion and sufficient reason for Arab economic retaliation against the United States, by means of an oil embargo and the withdrawal of petro-dollar funds from American banks.⁴³

A no less important channel of Soviet activities throughout the war was its communications with the American administration, which included several messages from Brezhnev to Reagan. As early as 10 June the Soviet leader forwarded an urgent message to his American counterpart, which apparently contained an implied and subtle threat of Soviet intervention, should the war assume more menacing proportions.⁴⁴ Though it is difficult to ascertain the exact impact of the Soviet note – Reagan was reported to have responded by cautioning Brezhnev not to contemplate any intervention⁴⁵ – it may have strengthened the case of those within the administration who supported the restraint of Israel; indeed, on 11 June Israel gave in to American pressures to accept a ceasefire.

Moscow's diplomatic activity was supplemented by a vocal propaganda campaign intended to deter Israel by indicating the grave consequences of its 'aggression'. As early as 7 June, a day after the onset of hostilities, TASS issued its first official statement regarding the war, which condemned the invasion of Lebanon and warned Israel that the continuation of its campaign was 'an adventure which may cost Israel dear'.⁴⁶ A week later, as Israeli forces, in disregard of the 11 June ceasefire agreement, arrived at the outskirts of Beirut and appeared to be on the verge of driving the Syrians out of the Beq'a valley, the Soviet government issued a more strongly worded official statement:

Israel is committing a criminal act of genocide in Lebanon. Sparing no one, the troops of the aggressor are virtually annihilating the Palestinians to a man, and thousands of Lebanese are also dying. . . . The action by Israel and its patrons also poses a threat to other Arab states. The same old line of subordinating the Arab countries, one by one, to the imperialist dictates is clear. . . . *The Soviet Union takes the side of the Arabs, not in words but in deeds.* It is working to bring about the withdrawal of the aggressor from Lebanon. *Those who now direct Israeli policy should not forget that the Middle East is situated in close proximity to the southern borders of the Soviet Union, and events there cannot fail to affect the interests of the USSR. We warn Israel about this.*⁴⁷

As is well known, neither the Soviet warnings nor the military actions that accompanied them had any direct impact on Israel. The second Israeli-Syrian ceasefire, which came into effect on 25 June and terminated the war between the two countries, resulted from both American pressures and the attainment of Israel's operational objectives (i.e. the securing of the Beirut-Damascus highway and the resulting severance of Beirut).

If Moscow's political and military activities on behalf of the Arab cause did have any impact, it was of an indirect and elusive nature: namely, the injection of a greater sense of urgency into the American decision-making process. But this does not imply 'virtual inaction' on the Soviet part, for it was through the American channel that the USSR had attempted to influence the outcome of previous Arab-Israeli wars, with varying degrees of success. Given Moscow's commitment to the Arab cause from the mid-1950s onwards, on the one hand, and Israel's military supremacy over its Arab neighbours, on

the other, there was little the Soviets could do to save their allies from defeat but to put pressure on the United States to restrain Israel. Thus Soviet threats of military intervention in the 1956, 1967 and 1973 wars were effective only to the extent of prompting the United States to pressure Israel to halt its advance.⁴⁸

Moreover, both the territorial confinement of the 1982 War and Syria's relatively limited involvement in it excluded from the outset the possibility of, and the need for, direct Soviet intervention on behalf of Syria. Fighting Israel on Lebanese territory, Damascus had no legal grounds to request the dispatch of Soviet forces, particularly since Israel was not at war with Lebanon, and the latter, maintaining a traditionally pro-Western orientation, was most unlikely to request Soviet support. Even if there was some truth in Israeli intelligence reports about the existence of a Soviet undertaking to send troops to Syria, should the regime there be in imminent danger⁴⁹ – and there are no indications that a formal pledge to this effect was made – such an agreement could hardly be invoked under the circumstances of the 1982 War, which took place outside Syrian territory, involved a small portion of Syria's armed forces and thus fell short of posing a serious threat to the Asad regime.

Consequently, Moscow did not have 'some questions to answer' from its Syrian friends. Unlike the PLO, whose military infrastructure in Lebanon suffered a mortal blow, Syria could – and did – take some pride in its combat performance. True, its position in Lebanon deteriorated following its limited defeat on the ground and the public humiliation attending the unmatched losses in the aerial and air defence fields. Yet Syria's success in frustrating the Israeli campaign, and, moreover, in attaining this objective alone, without proper air cover and in the face of Israel's overwhelming numerical superiority on the ground, was considered a significant achievement by the regime in Damascus. Thus, while the PLO was quick to express its frustration over the lack of support, Syria had nothing but praise for the Soviet Union. For example, a statement on the military situation, issued on 19 June by the Progressive National Front, referred to the Soviet Union as 'the loyal friend of our people and nation and the strong supporter of our struggle and right'.⁵⁰ Similarly, the Syrian government, in its meeting on 21 June,

emphasized that the deep and strong cooperation between Syria and the USSR, which is a permanent base of the struggle against the powers of aggression . . . would remain a constant basis that

gives the battle between the Arabs, on one side, and America and Israel on the other, its real scope in this region and everywhere else.⁵¹

Its satisfaction with Moscow's role during the 1982 War notwithstanding, Damascus sought to exploit the events in Lebanon to gain a greater Soviet commitment to Syrian security, in the form of both extended military supplies and, if possible, the elevation of the 1980 Treaty into a bilateral defence pact.⁵² The Syrian efforts to mobilize greater Soviet support, which included a secret – and highly important – visit paid by Asad to Moscow in late June, were largely successful. The Soviet Union was anxious to eliminate Israel's (and, more so, America's) presence and influence in Lebanon, on the one hand, and to undermine the Reagan Peace Plan of 1 September 1982,⁵³ on the other; and Syria was the only actor capable of achieving these goals.

Consequently, while turning down the idea of a defence pact and taking care not to link the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty to the crisis in Lebanon, the Soviets were responsive to Asad's requests in several crucial respects. First, just as Nasser's famous visit to Moscow in January 1970 resulted in the deployment of an extensive Soviet air defence system in Egypt, so Asad's visit culminated in the decision to restore the 'lost honour' of Syria's air defence system by deploying two brigades of Soviet-manned SAM-5 surface-to-air missiles in Syria.⁵⁴ Second, as shown earlier, not only did the Soviets agree to replace Syria's war losses, but they apparently acquiesced in Asad's request to back the further expansion of the Syrian armed forces; this acquiescence manifested itself in \$2.8 billion worth of weapons supplied to Syria between June 1982 and early 1984. Finally, Moscow recognized Syria's role in Lebanon, and declared its readiness to support Damascus in attempts to drive the Israeli (and American) forces out of that country – attempts which made extensive use of brinkmanship tactics, threatening on more than one occasion to slide into an open confrontation between Syria and Israel.

While Soviet support for the Syrian anti-Israel campaign in Lebanon did not imply, at least during Brezhnev's last months, any willingness to go beyond the already established pattern of arms supplies and political backing to the realm of direct military intervention on Syria's behalf, Moscow's forthcoming approach was immediately reciprocated by Syria. Although he sent Foreign Minister Khaddam to Washington in early July 1982 to explore, with his Saudi

counterpart, the possibility of American pressures on Israel, Asad viewed the United States as the motivating force behind the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and willingly joined the Soviet attempts to foil the American policy. Apart from supporting Brezhnev's initiative of 21 July to convene an international conference on the Middle East,⁵⁵ Syria conducted a fierce campaign against the Reagan Plan from its very announcement, playing a decisive role in its ultimate failure. Thus, at the Fez summit of the Arab leaders in September 1982, Syria obstructed Saudi attempts to bridge the gap between the Reagan Plan and the Arab position on a settlement. Similarly, Syria exploited its participation in the seven-member committee, which travelled to several capitals (including Washington), as a means to explain the Fez decisions and thus to forestall the slightest deviation from the Fez peace plan.

In November 1982, however, Leonid Brezhnev died, leaving his successor, Yuri Andropov, to bring Soviet–Syrian cooperation to its peak.

9 The Post-Brezhnev Interregnum

Upon his accession to power in mid-November 1982, Yuri Andropov was confronted by two interconnected adverse ramifications of the 1982 War: on the one hand, the Israeli and American forces in Lebanon and the resultant pressure on the Lebanese regime to conclude a separate peace treaty with Israel, and, on the other, America's efforts to bring about a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement along the lines of the Reagan Plan. In order to overcome these problems, Andropov moved resolutely and swiftly along his predecessor's path. Having concluded a new large-scale arms deal with Syria as early as November 1982,¹ he rapidly carried out Brezhnev's pledge (given during Asad's visit to Moscow in late June 1982) to dispatch Soviet air defence units to Syria: in late 1982 Israeli and American intelligence services detected preparations for the instalment of two Soviet-manned SAM-5 surface-to-air missile brigades in Syria and by January 1983 these units had already been deployed in the Damascus and Homs areas.

The unprecedented delivery of SAM-5s to Syria – the first time that such missiles had been deployed outside the Soviet Union – was accompanied by vocal support for the Syrian cause. Avoiding any reference to the presence of Soviet troops on Syrian soil, the Soviets accused the United States and Israel of harbouring aggressive designs against Syria and defended the latter's right to take the necessary military measures for its protection:

Displaying valid and lawful concern for its own defence, Syria has carried out a number of defensive measures *on its own territory*, and, in particular has established new anti-missile defence complexes there. These natural measures of a sovereign state have aroused unimagined hysteria in Tel Aviv and Washington. This very hysteria betrays the creators of the aggressive anti-Arab policy. They would like to untie Israel's hands for further ventures against Syria and other Arab countries.²

The Soviets also warned Israel not to take any military action against Syria, going so far as to hint of their willingness to intervene on

Syria's behalf, though not on Lebanese territory, ³ should Syria be subjected to an Israeli attack. 'Israel, performing the role of gendarme *vis-à-vis* its neighbours, is now threatening Syria', argued *Pravda* on 9 February 1983, but 'everyone can see that an attack on Syria by Israel would only lead to an expansion in the zone of confrontation in the Middle East with all its ensuing consequences, and that such a development must strain still further the already acute tension in the world'. And the Soviet Radio went a step further in explaining what 'an expansion in the zone of confrontation' meant:

The Soviet Union and Syria are linked by a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation which is considered the basis of the relations between the two countries. It is essential that all this must not be forgotten by those who threaten to use arms. . . . Syria is not alone in confronting the hostile forces. It is supported by all the forces of progress and freedom in the world, headed by the friendly USSR, which is loyal to its commitments towards its ally Syria under the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.⁴

Whether or not the Soviet warnings had any restraining impact on Israel, they certainly enhanced Syria's self-confidence.⁵ Encouraged by the massive flow of arms, the vocal Soviet support and the growing war weariness in Israel, Syria launched a two-pronged effort to frustrate the Reagan Plan and any Lebanese-Israeli peace treaty.

'Already in the autumn of 1982, Syria communicated to the US administration – and through it to Israel – its categorical refusal to consider the withdrawal of its troops from Lebanon before all foreign troops had been evacuated. 'We want Lebanon to have accord and security now and we want its legitimate authority to assume full control of all of Lebanon', Asad told a US congressional delegation in November 1982; therefore, 'when the Israeli occupation is removed from Lebanon we will not make any conditions for our withdrawal'. 'However', he added, 'if Lebanon needed our presence before the Israeli invasion, then its need now is more urgent'.⁶

Oddly enough, this Syrian message passed unheeded. The administration, assuming that the various constraints on Syria's continued presence in Lebanon (e.g. the financial costs, the threat of a Syrian-Israeli confrontation) would eventually force Damascus to modify its position on the question of withdrawal, decided to strive for a separate Israeli-Lebanese agreement which would present the Syrians with a *fait accompli*. But the administration failed to take into

account both the intensity of Syria's long-standing interest in Lebanon and the extent of Syrian influence there. Instead of moderating Syrian hostility, the US strategy triggered a relentless Syrian campaign against a separate Lebanese-Israeli deal. This was conducted on several levels, ranging from heavy pressures on the Lebanese president, Amin Gumayel, to avoid any concessions to Israel, to material support for Gumayel's opponents (particularly the Lebanese Druze), to the significant reinforcement of the Syrian forces in Lebanon to the unprecedented and menacing level (from the Israeli standpoint) of 1200 tanks.⁷

The consolidation of Syria's military presence in Lebanon was detrimental not only to the evolution of the American-inspired Lebanese-Israeli dialogue, but also to the viability of the Reagan Plan. Wishing to exploit Syria's strong position in Lebanon, Asad linked the Reagan Plan to the developments there, portraying these as part of an American-Israeli attempt to impose a 'second Camp David' on the Arabs. Moreover, when in October 1982, the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, decided to enter into negotiations with King Hussein on the possibility of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation in peace talks based on the Reagan Plan, Asad began to make life difficult for Arafat's organization, *al-Fath* – the largest of all PLO constituent organizations: in December 1982 Syria imposed severe restrictions on the movements of *Fath* members in northern Lebanon and the Beq'a, and confiscated \$22.5 million worth of weapons and military equipment sent to the PLO.⁸

Combined with a skilful manipulation of the pro-Syrian constituent organizations of the PLO, as well as with a political propaganda campaign, the Syrian pressure bore immediate fruit: in mid-February 1983 the Palestine National Council (PNC) convened in Algiers for its 16th session and categorically rejected the suitability of the Reagan Plan as a basis for the solution of the Palestinian problem. True, the PNC left the door open for further contacts between Arafat and King Hussein. But the highly restricted framework within which Arafat was allowed to act doomed the Jordanian-Palestinian negotiations. On 10 April 1983, the frustrated and impatient Jordanian government issued a communiqué admitting the collapse of the Jordanian-Palestinian dialogue and putting the blame on the PLO.

Since it implied the *de facto* collapse of the Reagan Plan, the Jordanian announcement was received with deep satisfaction in both Damascus and Moscow. Like Syria, the USSR had been worried by the possibility of the PLO being integrated into the Reagan peace

initiative. Thus, while avoiding direct criticism of the PLO leadership, Moscow voiced subtle expressions of dissatisfaction with Arafat's moves, as well as support for Syria's position on the Jordanian-Palestinian negotiations. For example, a *Selskaya Zhizn* article on 22 January 1983 contained severe criticism of those who 'are trying to link up that anti-Arab plan [i.e. the Reagan plan] and the plan approved by the Arab heads of state and government in Fez'. Similarly, in a meeting with Farouq Qadoumi in November 1982, Andrei Gromyko urged the PLO to increase its cooperation with 'the national patriotic forces of the Arab world, above all, with Syria, which resolutely opposes the plans of the aggressors'.⁹ Two months later, in January 1983, an equally urgent request to the PLO to mend its fences with Damascus was reportedly addressed to Yasser Arafat by Andropov in person, during their meeting in Moscow.¹⁰

Perhaps its most significant service to the Soviet Union since the (temporary) obstruction of the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement talks in early 1975, Syria's undermining of the Reagan Plan was not matched by a success on the Lebanese front: on 17 May 1983 Israel signed its second peace treaty with a second Arab country – Lebanon. Yet the celebrated American-Israeli achievement turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory: Syria's uncompromising rejection soon rendered it inoperative.

Fully aware that Syria could wreck the agreement by not evacuating its forces from Lebanon, Asad embarked upon a determined effort to eradicate what he termed as a 'still-born agreement'.¹¹ Damascus therefore denounced the treaty as 'more dangerous than the Camp David accords . . . capitulation and subjugation that would greatly harm Lebanon and the Arab world',¹² and sought to delegitimize Amin Gumayel and his government by portraying them in narrow, sectarian terms:

The Lebanese government has crossed the narrow space that used to separate it from the Phalangist party, and has unmasked its identity as a tool for this party and its Israeli policies and aims to dominate Lebanon by signing the document of handing Lebanon over to Israel.¹³

By way of relegating the Lebanese leadership to the level of Phalangist stooges, Asad toiled unweariedly to forge the Lebanese forces opposed to the treaty into a unified front. This goal was attained in late July 1983 with the establishment of 'National Salvation Front',

an organization linking seven parties, headed by the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and the Shi'ite leader Nabih Beri, together with the leading politicians Rashid Karami and Suleiman Faranjiyeh.

The formation of the Front was accompanied by heavy military pressures on the Lebanese government: in early June 1983 the Christian port town of Junieh came under bombardments from positions located in Syrian-controlled territory, and in the following months Syrian units clashed with the Lebanese army on several occasions. These pressures intensified considerably following the unilateral evacuation of Israeli forces from the Shouf Mountains in early September 1983 and the seizure of these strategic mountains by the Syrians and their Lebanese allies.

Syria's vigorous campaign was followed by the Soviet Union with mixed feelings. To be sure, Moscow was as keen as Damascus to obstruct the Lebanese-Israeli agreement, since the successful implementation of the American-sponsored arrangement could once more leave the USSR on the sidelines, whereas its collapse would mean a boost to the USSR's prestige and a humiliating blow to its rival superpower. Indeed, indications of a renaissance in Moscow's regional standing were seen that summer, when the US administration, in disregard of its pronounced commitment to exclude the Soviets from negotiations on the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, approached the USSR on several occasions, asking it to use its good offices in Damascus. On 10 May, a week before the formal conclusion of the treaty, the US secretary of state, George Shultz, forwarded a highly publicized appeal to the Soviets, pleading them to 'get on the side of peace' by encouraging Syria to accept the impending agreement. A similar request was directed to the USSR a month later in a meeting between American and Soviet diplomats in Washington, and in September 1983, as the pro-Syrian Druze were pushing the Maronites out of the Shouf Mountains, Lawrence Eagleburger, under-secretary of state for political affairs, met with Oleg Sokolov, the *chargé d'affaires* of the Soviet Embassy, in an attempt to urge Moscow to exercise restraint in Lebanon and, moreover, to use their influence on the Syrians to this end.¹⁴

Yet despite the substantial advantages to be gained from Damascus's relentless campaign, the Soviets had three main reasons for unease. First, Syria's struggle to destroy the Israeli-Lebanese agreement brought it – or so it appeared at the time – to the verge of war with Israel. Relying on war weariness in Israel to prevent a second round of fighting in Lebanon, Asad resorted to his famous

brinkmanship tactics, allowing pro-Syrian resistance groups to operate from Syrian-controlled Lebanese territory against Israeli targets, and even initiating sporadic, albeit limited, direct clashes with the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). In May 1983 the two countries came close to full confrontation when, in response to Syrian threats and alarming moves (e.g. large-scale manoeuvres on the Golan Heights, call-up of reservists), Israel put some of its units on a higher state of alert and declared a partial mobilization.

The second cause of concern was the growing tension between Syria and its Lebanese supporters, on the one hand, and the Western – particularly US – forces stationed in Beirut, on the other. True, the spectre of such a confrontation was not entirely unwelcome to the Soviets, since it would seriously challenge the American military presence in Lebanon (a goal that Moscow was unable to attain on its own) and offer the USSR a useful weapon against US Middle Eastern policy. But the risk that escalation could follow a direct Syrian–American encounter was too great. After the occupation of the Shouf, as Druze and Shi'ite military pressure on the Lebanese government intensified, the US marines in Beirut came under increasingly heavy fire, and on 23 October a suicide truck-bomb destroyed their headquarters in Beirut, charging a heavy death toll of 241 troops. American retaliation, in the form of heavy naval shelling of Syrian and Druze positions in the Shouf, as well as air-strikes on Syrian strongholds in the Beq'a, did little to moderate Syria's bellicose stance.¹⁵

Finally, Moscow was concerned at the heavy pressure Syria was putting on the PLO in its effort to undermine Arafat's leadership and to make the weakened organization subservient to its own wishes. As during the 1976 Lebanese crisis, the growing conflict between Syria and the PLO was highly inconvenient for the Soviets, forcing them to tread cautiously between two of their most prized Middle Eastern allies. By June 1983 the Syrian pressure had produced an armed revolt against Arafat's authority by pro-Syrian elements within al-Fath, headed by Abu Musa. Though the Syrians vehemently denied any responsibility for the internal strife within al-Fath, it was evident that the rebellion in the Syrian-controlled Beq'a could not have taken place without Damascus's approval. Indeed, as the year neared its end, Syria's involvement in the revolt became more than evident: having driven Arafat's loyalists out of the Beq'a to the Tripoli area, and ultimately into the city itself, in mid-November Syrian-backed units laid siege to Tripoli; and a month later, a humiliating evacu-

ation of PLO forces from Lebanon took place – the second that year, though this time from Tripoli rather than from Beirut, and under Syrian, rather than Israeli, pressure.

Given this amalgam of risks and opportunities, Moscow's anxiety to undermine the American–Israeli position in Lebanon, and its interest in keeping its relationship with Syria intact, came to outweigh the fears of escalation. Flatly rejecting American appeals to restrain Syria, and ensuring that this rejection received due publicity,¹⁶ Moscow justified Syria's uncompromising drive against the agreement of 17 May, which ran 'counter to the independence of Lebanon and its freedom and interests, as well as the security of Syria and its interests':

There are few examples in history when the aggressor – who has stained himself with bloody crimes in Lebanon – has been rewarded with such cynicism and with open disregard for the commonly accepted principles of morality and law . . . Syria was not involved in the talks and now attempts are made to impose on it unacceptable terms. Syria is told that it should withdraw its troops from Lebanon. Syria's troops are in Lebanon under an Arab League mandate. If Syria withdraws, now that Lebanon has been overpowered by Israel, its military-strategic positions in the face of the constant Israeli threat would grow weaker, and all the more so since the USA is behind the Israeli aggression.¹⁷

As the only obstacle to the transformation of Lebanon into a 'spring-board for aggressive actions against neighbouring Arab states',¹⁸ the Syrian position was bound to incur the wrath of the American–Israeli axis. However, the United States and Israel had better keep in mind two fundamental facts: first, that 'Syria has an adequate defence potential to repel aggression'; second, that Syria does not stand alone 'in the Arab world or the international arena in general', for 'the Soviet Union will continue to support the struggle of the Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian and other Arab peoples against the aggressive schemes of the USA and Israel'.¹⁹ This pledge was accompanied by concrete demonstrations of backing, such as the visit of the aircraft carrier *Novosibirsk* to Tartus in late June, and, more important, the delivery of the advanced SS-21 surface-to-surface missiles to the Syrian army in October (the first delivery of this kind to a local ally).²⁰

Another important facet of Moscow's support for Syria's Lebanese

policy was the Soviet position *vis-à-vis* the deepening breach between Damascus and the PLO leadership. Already in late 1982 the USSR's disenchantment with Arafat's 'flirting' with King Hussein led it to support Syria in its feud with the PLO. Similarly, the USSR had little difficulty in making up its mind with which party to side in the renewed confrontation between Asad and Arafat in the summer of 1983. In June, for example, when Syrian-Palestinian relations were deteriorating fast, following the Abu-Musa rebellion and Arafat's disgraceful expulsion from Damascus, it was the PLO, and not Syria, which incurred the lion's share of Soviet displeasure. In a series of urgent messages to Arafat, Andropov reportedly urged him to do all he could to reach a *rapprochement* with Damascus, admitting the USSR's limited leverage over Syria. A month later, a scheduled visit by Arafat to the Soviet Union failed to materialize, thus indicating the poor status of the relations between Moscow and the PLO. When Farouq Qadoumi, instead of Arafat, arrived in the Soviet capital in mid-July, he not only failed to obtain a Soviet agreement to mediate between the rival factions of the PLO, as well as between the PLO and Syria, but also was pressured to increase PLO cooperation with the 'progressive Arab countries'.²¹

To be sure, Syria, too, did not avoid a measure of Soviet pressure, as Moscow became increasingly convinced of the counter-productivity of the Syrian campaign against the PLO. Far from undermining Arafat's leadership or bringing the PLO under Syrian control, in itself an undesirable development from the Soviet point of view, Damascus – and Moscow – had to watch Arafat resume his flirtation with Jordan and, moreover, turn to Egypt in an attempt to gain protection against Syrian hostility. In the light of these developments the Soviets decided to voice their concern with the Syrian behaviour: during a visit to Moscow on 10–11 November 1983, Abd al-Khalim Khaddam was told by Gromyko that the USSR regarded 'as extremely important and pressing the need to overcome strife and restore unity in the ranks of the liberation movement of the Arab people of Palestine, which must continue to function as an active and effective factor of the anti-imperialist struggle in the Middle East'.²² A similar message was reportedly conveyed in a personal communication between Andropov and Asad in mid-November.²³

However, the Soviet pressure on Syria posed no threat to the bilateral relationship: the Soviets continued to provide extensive shipments of arms to the Syrian armed forces, as well as staunch support for Damascus's campaign against the United States and

Israel. Furthermore, when in open defiance of the Soviet request (made during Khaddam's visit to Moscow) Syria launched a fresh offensive against the PLO forces in Tripoli, the USSR refrained from criticizing the Syrian move, emphasizing instead the need for reconciliation between the PLO, 'the political vanguard' of the Palestinian resistance, and Syria, 'which now is a most important force countering the aggressive plans of the USA and Israel'.²⁴

Indeed, it was Moscow's keen awareness of Syria's 'most important role' which was at the root of the more daring and far-reaching Soviet backing of the Syrian campaign in Lebanon under Andropov. The relative salience of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty throughout most stages of the crisis reflected this awareness: whereas during the various Israeli-Syrian crises of the late Brezhnev years the USSR went to great lengths to prevent any unwarranted interpretation of the commitments entailed in the bilateral treaty, shunning almost completely any reference to this accord,²⁵ Andropov was inclined to give the treaty a far more generous interpretation. Though making it clear that Moscow's commitment to Syrian security in accordance with the Treaty did *not* go beyond Syria's territory – more precisely, that this commitment did not extend to the Syrian forces in Lebanon – Andropov did not fail to imply that the USSR felt itself obliged to come to Syria's aid in case of need.

'The Soviet-Syrian treaty has acquired particular significance in the present circumstances, with the imperialists constantly bringing pressure to bear upon Syria to make it change its steadfast Middle East policy', wrote the Soviet weekly *New Times* on the third anniversary of the 1980 treaty, 'it is not easy, however, to undermine the Soviet-Syrian cooperation. . . . Year after year the Syrian-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation serves as the basis for rebuffing the aggressive policy pursued by the imperialists and Zionists'.²⁶ Pavel Demchenko, Pravda's Middle Eastern specialist, was even more outspoken regarding the concrete implications of the treaty for Syrian security, arguing that 'any aggression against Syria is an extremely dangerous venture . . . [since] Syria enjoys [the] all-round support of the USSR, [and] cannot regard itself alone in any situation'.²⁷ And the joint communiqué issued at the close of Khaddam's visit to Moscow in November 1983 confirmed Moscow's 'adherence to the commitments under [the 1980] treaty'.²⁸

Moscow's ardent aid and support for the Syrian venture in Lebanon bore abundant fruit. By the time of Andropov's death on 10 February 1984, only fifteen months after assuming power, Syria had

generously repaid the Soviets. First, it had succeeded in dealing a mortal blow to the Reagan Plan in the spring of 1983. Second, through direct and indirect pressure on the US Marines in Beirut, it had managed to attain the much-coveted Soviet goal of driving the United States out of Lebanon: on 7 February 1984 Reagan announced his intention to withdraw the Marines from Beirut to US ships off the Lebanese coast, and within three weeks the evacuation had been completed. Finally, the relentless Syrian campaign against the American-sponsored Israeli-Lebanese agreement had led to the collapse of that arrangement: on 5 March 1984, in an attempt to save his shaky regime, President Amin Gumayel unilaterally abrogated the 17 May Agreement with Israel.

During Andropov's brief period of leadership the Soviets also benefited from reinforced relations with Syria. In the political field, the Soviets drew comfort from Syria's support for the convening of an international conference on the Middle East. Interestingly, the fact that the USSR and Syria found themselves in opposing camps in the Gulf War with the former aiding Iraq and the latter supporting Iran did not damage their cooperation. Although it injected a measure of antagonism into the relationship, Syria's closeness to Iran provided a useful channel of communication between Moscow and Tehran. For example, immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, when Moscow was still hoping to make inroads into Tehran, it sanctified the delivery of Soviet weaponry from Syria (and Libya) to Iran.²⁹ The importance of the Syrian 'back channel' grew significantly in 1983, when Soviet-Iranian relations reached their lowest ebb following the clampdown on the leftist opposition in Iran by the clerics; indeed, during that year Syria was reported to have mediated, though unsuccessfully, between the USSR and Iran.³⁰

Benefits also accrued in the economic field. In April 1983, for example, the two countries signed an agreement on the promotion of maritime and shipping cooperation which included the reciprocal granting of Most-Favoured-Nation status (MFN).³¹ A month earlier, Syria was reported to have given the Soviet Union, unexpectedly, a \$120 million contract for a power station outside Damascus, already awarded to the Swedish company ASEA. Similarly, to the irritation of the Ministry of Transportation, President Asad ordered the national airline to be re-equipped with TU-154 passenger jets, instead of the Boeing which constituted the backbone of the fleet at the time.³²

CHERNENKO AND THE SYRIANS

Faced with the irksome task of restoring Moscow's regional standing, severely damaged during the 1982 War, Soviet Middle Eastern policy under Andropov became increasingly dependent on Syria's actions and, in consequence, almost exclusively concerned with events in Lebanon. Konstantin Chernenko was bequeathed a far more favourable political constellation than his predecessor. With the US Marines (and other Western forces) banished from Lebanon, the Israeli-Lebanese agreement destroyed and the Reagan Plan tarnished, the new Secretary-General could gradually carry Soviet Middle Eastern policy out of the confines of Lebanon, thereby making it less dependent on Syria's action or inaction. In doing so, Chernenko could rely not only on the improvement of Moscow's regional position, which owed much to Syria's vigorous policy, but also on the domestic turmoil that broke out in Syria in late 1983. On 13 November 1983 Asad was unexpectedly hospitalized for what was later found to be a critical heart failure. This event triggered the first significant succession struggle within the Syrian leadership; the conflict was active until Asad's recovery in the spring of 1984 and remained latent until the end of that year.

From his earliest days in power Chernenko embarked upon a campaign to widen Moscow's Middle Eastern horizons beyond the pro-Soviet 'radical' camp. He was helped in this by the return to power of the Israeli Labour Party in autumn 1984 (though in the framework of a National Unity government with the right-wing Likud Party), since the Labour Party had declared its readiness to negotiate a peace settlement with Jordan that involved territorial compromise on Israel's part. Hence the Soviet courtship of Jordan, illustrated both by the Jordanian chief of staff's visit to Moscow in August to discuss a new Soviet-Jordanian arms deal and by the Soviet peace plan of 29 July 1984, which supported a confederation between the Hashemite Kingdom and the envisaged Palestinian state on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.³³ Hence, too, the Soviet efforts to make inroads into the 'conservative' Arab camp, leading to the resumption of full diplomatic relations with Egypt in July 1984. Equally irritating for the Syrians were Andrei Gromyko's meeting with Yasser Arafat in Berlin on 7 October (the first meeting between Arafat and a high-ranking Soviet official in nearly two years), the meeting between the Soviet and Israeli foreign ministers in New

York during the United Nations General Assembly in September 1984, and the visit of the Iraqi foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, to Moscow in October 1984.

Chernenko's attempts to woo the conservative Arab states notwithstanding, he took much care to reassure Syria of Moscow's continued support and backing. On 10–13 March, Geidar Aliyev, a member of the Politburo and first deputy premier of the USSR, arrived in Damascus for an official visit, 'bearing a warm message' from Chernenko.³⁴ Although it is not clear whether the visit produced any concrete results,³⁵ the joint communiqué clearly reflected Moscow's eagerness to placate Damascus. This was evidenced from the 'high appreciation' for Syria's 'consistent stand on Mid-Eastern affairs and its effective contribution to countering the US–Israeli attempts to force the Arab people to accept the onerous terms of settlement and to embark on the road of separate deals', from Moscow's support for Syria in its feud with the PLO, and from the implicit Soviet criticism of Arafat's flirtation with Jordan and Egypt, which threatened the unity of the 'progressive camp':

The parties believe that the achievement of the national aspirations of the Palestinians is impossible without respect for the decisions of the National Council of Palestine aimed at countering the Israeli aggression and the Camp David policy of separate deals, including the 'Reagan Plan', and without the close cooperation of the PLO with Syria, all the other progressive Arab countries and the patriotic forces of the Arab world. The Soviet Union and Syria are convinced of the need to preserve the unity of the Palestinian resistance movement and to overcome as soon as possible differences within the PLO – the only lawful representative of the Arab people of Palestine – on a progressive patriotic and anti-imperialist basis.³⁶

Interestingly enough, neither Aliyev's visit nor the high praise in the Soviet media for Syria's 'anti-imperialist' role³⁷ reassured Asad of Moscow's future course. Apart from his displeasure with the general direction of Chernenko's policy – Syria's vocal support for the Soviet peace plan of 29 July could hardly disguise its unhappiness about the suggested confederation between the Palestinian state and Jordan³⁸ – Asad began to doubt the USSR's readiness to maintain its extensive military support of Syria, which had been established following the 1982 Lebanon War. Moscow's generosity in the aftermath of the war

was directly related to its anxiety to recover its regional standing following the Israeli action in Lebanon. Once Moscow's sense of vulnerability diminished as a result of the American-Israeli setbacks in Lebanon, Asad feared that the USSR would cut its supplies to Syria. Such fears must have been compounded by the view expressed in the Soviet media that Syria 'now has the defensive capability needed to protect its national independence and defend its political line'.³⁹

Given these apprehensions, and following the implementation of the huge arms deals signed with Brezhnev and Andropov in the summer and autumn of 1982, in late May Asad sent his younger brother, Vice-President Rif'at Asad,⁴⁰ to Moscow, only to get first-hand proof of Moscow's less forthcoming approach to the issue of military support. While pledging to maintain 'unswerving support' for Syria's 'principled position and its steadfastness and firmness in the face of US-Israeli threats and blackmail', the Soviet leaders made it clear that this support did not necessarily relate to the military sphere, since in their view, 'the Arabs possess all necessary means for foiling the schemes of US imperialism and its Israeli partners'.⁴¹

Asad was expecting far more from his major ally than expressions of support. On 15 October 1984 he arrived in Moscow for an official visit, the first of its kind since the historic October 1980 one during which the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty had been signed.⁴² The special significance of the visit for Damascus and the high expectations pinned on it, could be easily detected from the superlatives employed by the Syrian media to describe the visit:

President Asad's visit to the USSR is of great international and regional significance and . . . rises to the level of a historic event. . . . A review of the result of previous visits by President Asad to the USSR indicates that this visit will have a long list of positive and fruitful results in favour of cooperation between the two countries . . . Syria continues to believe that there is still ample scope for further broadening cooperation in all fields to serve the interests of the two friendly countries.⁴³

The Syrian optimism, however, was not reciprocated by the Soviets. On the contrary, to judge by the exceptionally limited and low-key coverage given by the Soviet media to the visit, it was no more successful than Rif'at's talks in Moscow four months earlier. Not only did Asad fail to get the assurances he sought with regard to

Moscow's attitude towards Jordan and Egypt, but the Soviets were reported to have tried to convince him to adopt a more lenient approach towards these countries, arguing that Jordan and Egypt (as well as Yasser Arafat) wanted a comprehensive, and not a separate, settlement.⁴⁴ Two other bones of contention during the visit were related to the Syrian-PLO feud and the Iran-Iraq War: the Soviets reportedly emphasized the urgency of a Syrian-Iraqi reconciliation and pressurized Asad to reopen pipelines carrying Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean terminal of Baniyas, cut off in April 1982.⁴⁵

On top of these differences on regional issues, Asad found his hosts equally cool on the bilateral level. True, he succeeded in extracting a Soviet agreement on increased economic and military aid to Syria,⁴⁶ but to Asad's obvious dismay, the Soviets declined his request for a moratorium on Syria's military debt⁴⁷ and, moreover, took the exceptional step of linking their support for Syria with Damascus's willingness to assist 'other Arab nations in every way in their work for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East'.⁴⁸ This linkage was particularly galling for Syria, not only because it indicated the Soviets' determination to go ahead with a new arms deal with Jordan, whose relations with Syria were very poor at the time,⁴⁹ but also because it implied an erosion in Syria's position as Moscow's most prominent ally. Indeed, during the visit Asad was apparently informed by Chernenko of the latter's intention to withdraw the Soviet air defence units from Syria and to transfer the control of the SA-5 missiles to the Syrians. While this decision may be considered a Syrian achievement – the equipping of the Syrian armed forces with important weapons systems not previously under their direct control – it certainly reflected Moscow's decreasing readiness to take risks on Syria's behalf.⁵⁰

Despite his disappointment with the outcome of the visit, Asad refrained from any public criticism of the Soviet behaviour, thus demonstrating his anxiety to preserve an atmosphere of 'business as usual' in Soviet-Syrian relations. Moreover, the joint communiqué issued at the close of the visit contained both 'support for the latest Soviet proposals on a Near East settlement and on convening an international conference to that end under UN auspices', and acquiescence in the Soviet request 'to preserve the unity of the Palestinian resistance movement and ensure the speediest surmounting of disagreements within the PLO'.⁵¹

The Syrian media, for their part, went out of their way to deny speculations about the failure of the visit and to portray it as a success story. 'The strategic, important results of President Hafiz Asad's visit

to Moscow will prove that Syria is not alone in the battle for extricating Arab rights and realizing firm, just peace in the region', argued *Tishrin*, 'the leaders of both countries agree that reinforcing the Syrian military capability *to establish a strategic balance* and deter aggressive adventures is a foregone conclusion'.⁵²

Syria's public satisfaction with the visit notwithstanding, Asad soon gave the Soviets some subtle, yet pointed, hints that Syria should not be taken for granted. For example, Foreign Minister al-Shara expressed in a number of interviews his country's support for an American mediation effort under the auspices of the UN to end the Israeli occupation of Lebanon; in al-Shara's view, the US administration had acknowledged its mistaken policy in Lebanon and had recognized Syria's central role in that region.⁵³

Another attempt to assert Syria's independence came in the form of President François Mitterrand's visit to Damascus in late November 1984 – the first visit of a French president to Syria since its independence. Given that some eight years earlier, in June 1976, during the height of the Soviet–Syrian confrontation over Lebanon, Asad journeyed to Paris for the first time during his presidency, the Syrian message to Moscow was unmistakable. And as if to dispel any remaining doubts in Moscow on this point, Syria publicized its intention to buy French and, perhaps other Western, arms.⁵⁴

It is difficult to assess the impact of the Syrian hints on Soviet decision-makers. On the one hand, the fact that the Soviet ambassador to Damascus, Felix Fedotov, responded to Mitterrand's visit by reiterating Moscow's staunch support for Syria and 'its progressive course under President Hafiz Asad' reflected a measure of Soviet anxiety.⁵⁵ On the other hand, given Syria's continued hostility towards the US, pronounced dependence on Soviet military support, and rapidly mounting economic problems, it is doubtful whether the Soviets took seriously Syria's threat to diversify its weapons sources.

At any rate, the fast and unpredictable tide of Middle Eastern events was soon to bring the USSR and Syria closer again: on 22–29 November 1984 the Palestinian National Council convened in Amman for its 17th session and, though rejecting King Hussein's call for a Middle East peace settlement based on Resolution 242, it left the door open for future contacts between Arafat and Hussein. Soon after, on 11 February 1985 the two leaders reached an agreement on joint Jordanian–Palestinian steps to be taken towards a Middle East settlement. The PNC's Amman session and the 11 February agreement were received by Moscow with bitter disappointment and

severe apprehensions. Having courted the 'conservative' Arab states for several months, the Chernenko regime felt that its Middle East campaign was running out of steam and that the USSR was yet again losing the political initiative to the United States. These fears were compounded by Arafat's moves, which revived old Soviet worries of a PLO shift towards the Reagan Plan.

In these circumstances, the USSR moved cautiously to improve the strained atmosphere between itself and Syria. While seeking to maintain the modest momentum in its relations with Jordan, the USSR, in deference to Syria, quietly gave up the idea of King Hussein's visit to Moscow scheduled for late 1984.⁵⁶ In the light of the UN-sponsored Israeli-Lebanese talks, which began in early November on Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, Moscow resumed its vocal support for what it defined as 'Syria's legitimate interest in Lebanon'. 'In connection with the evident difficulties at the talks and the murkiness of their prospects, quite a lot is being said in the Israeli and US press about Syria and its alleged negative influence both on the overall situation in the region and on the nature of Israeli-Lebanese relations', wrote Alexander Bovin in *Izvestiya* on 18 November 1984. 'However', he stated, 'the facts refute this assessment of the matter':

There are historical, geographical, cultural and ethnic factors for . . . Syria's interest. It is these factors which determine Syria's interest in being bordered by a stable and domestically settled state which is part of the Arab world and whose government is capable of taking Syria's interests and concerns into account. . . . Syria's special interest in Lebanese affairs is recognized by the Arab world. It is no accident that Syrian troops comprised the backbone of the inter-Arab peacekeeping forces in Lebanon . . . [hence] only a solution which is simultaneously based on Lebanon's sovereign rights to all Lebanese territory and which takes into account Syria's legitimate interests is possible.⁵⁷

From late 1984 onwards, the USSR resumed its support for Syria in its feud with the PLO leadership: deploring in strong terms the Arafat-Hussein agreement of 11 February 1985 as leading to the 'destruction of the reputation of and respect for the PLO, and also damaged its role as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people',⁵⁸ the Soviets urged Arafat and his followers to mend the rift with Syria.

10 Gorbachev and the Syrians

To judge by the announcement of a three-day public mourning in Syria over the death of Konstantin Chernenko on 10 March 1985, the ageing leader's attempts to remove the strains in Soviet–Syrian relations had been fully successful. But if the Syrians had cherished any expectations that the new Soviet Secretary-General, Mikhail Gorbachev, would continue the consolidation of bilateral relations to the peak reached under Andropov, they were quick to realize that the forceful and resolute backing of their brinkmanship tactics during Andropov's brief period of power was the exception rather than the rule as far as Soviet–Syrian relations were concerned. Like Brezhnev and Chernenko, Gorbachev preached caution and restraint, emphasizing the political option as the means of solving the Arab–Israeli conflict. Moreover, like his immediate predecessor, the new leader sought to prevent the United States from monopolizing the re-emerging political process in the Arab–Israeli sphere by broadening the USSR's regional base and reducing its dependence on Syria. He courted the conservative Arab states, by establishing diplomatic relations with Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, rescheduling Egypt's military debts and signing new economic agreements with this country in 1987, and brought Arafat, Asad's resented rival, to the fore of Moscow's Middle Eastern policy. Finally, and perhaps more alarming from the Syrian point of view, was the heavy emphasis laid by Gorbachev on the normalization of relations with Israel.

Soviet interest in Israel was, of course, no novel development. Moscow's awareness of the damage done to its regional standing by the severance of diplomatic relations with Jerusalem led it to maintain direct and indirect channels of communication with Israel and even to make occasional conciliatory gestures towards that country. Yet the scope and intensity of the Soviet–Israeli interaction were considerably widened and enhanced after Gorbachev assumed office. In July 1985 the Soviet and Israeli ambassadors to France held a secret meeting in Paris in which they reportedly discussed issues such as the restoration of bilateral relations and the possibility of a Syrian–Israeli agreement on the Golan Heights.¹ A year later, in August 1986, foreign ministry officials from the two countries met in

Helsinki to discuss consular matters. Though it ended on a slightly sour note, the Helsinki meeting was followed by bilateral contacts at a relatively high level,² and in July 1987 and 1988 respectively, Soviet and Israeli consular delegations were instated in Tel Aviv and Moscow. In all these dealings with Israel, the Soviets apparently used their relationship with Syria as a trump card implying that they had both the willingness and the capability to exercise influence over Damascus.³

In doing so, Gorbachev could rely on the growing internal and external plight of the Asad regime. On the domestic front, the economic crisis that had been overtaking Syria since the early 1980s intensified rapidly in 1985–7 forcing the regime to undertake severe austerity measures, including cutbacks in the standing armed forces. This economic crisis was compounded by a deterioration in Syria's internal security (e.g. a bombing campaign in Syrian towns, reported coup attempts in the autumn of 1986 and in the spring of 1987) as well as more active jockeying for position with the regime.⁴

Syria's external position was no more enviable. Having brought about the withdrawal of external forces from Lebanon (in the summer of 1985 Israel completed its pull-back from Lebanon, with the exception of limited forces left within a 'security zone' in the areas immediately adjoining Israeli territory), Asad discovered once again the problem of imposing law and order on this fractious country. A Syrian-engineered tripartite agreement signed in Damascus on 28 December 1985 between the Shi'ite leader, Nabih Berri, the Druze leader, Walid Jumblatt, and the Maronite leader, Elie Hobeika collapsed within a fortnight from its conclusion. In addition, Syria's authority in Lebanon was increasingly challenged throughout 1986 and 1987, both by the pro-Iranian extremist Shi'ite organization, the *Hizbollah*, and by Iran's mounting influence in Lebanese domestic affairs. It was Tehran, and not Damascus, which successfully mediated a ceasefire agreement between the pro-Syrian Amal militia and the Palestinian organizations in late 1986 thus terminating (albeit temporarily) the so-called 'Second Camps War' (the first had taken place in May 1985).

Apart from complicating Damascus's position within the Lebanese arena, friction with the *Hizbollah* unsettled Syria's relationship with its strategic ally, Iran. Moreover, despite the improvement in Syrian–Jordanian relations after 1985, Syria's support for Iran in the Gulf War strained its relations with the conservative Arab countries, and by mid-1986 most of the Gulf states had stopped their financial

aid to Syria given hitherto in accordance with the 1978 Baghdad decisions.

To make matters worse, Syria's insecurity increased considerably following the second missile crisis with Israel in December 1985–January 1986⁵ and the crisis after the abortive attempt to blow up an El-Al plane in London in April 1986. Not only did the London incident put Damascus in a frontal clash with Great Britain (and, to a lesser extent, the United States) but it also appeared to bring Israel and Syria to the verge of armed conflict. Had the terrorist act been successful, Israel would most probably have felt compelled to respond with a significant military strike. As things stood – and in spite of vehement Syrian denials of any connection with the London incident which neither the Israelis nor the British nor the Americans took seriously – Jerusalem wavered between the need for restraint and the urge to deter, if not to punish Syria. It therefore sent out equivocal signals, combining threats of retaliation with reassurances, that Israel harboured no aggressive designs against Damascus. Syria reacted to these contradictory signals by building up its forces on the Golan Heights and in the Beq'a as well as by unleashing a strident propaganda campaign highlighting its steadfastness in the face of the 'Israeli threat'. So tense was the situation along the Syrian–Israeli border that in mid-May the American administration took care to warn the two countries, both covertly and overtly, against going to war.

London's reaction, though limited to the diplomatic front, was no less harsh than that of Israel. On 10 May 1986 the British authorities expelled three Syrian diplomats for complicity in the incident after Syria rejected a request that their diplomatic immunity be waived so that they could be questioned about the El-Al bombing attempt. Some five months later, on 24 October 1986, Britain took the extreme step of breaking off diplomatic relations with Syria after a London court found Syrian involvement in the April incident. The United States and Canada followed suit in a gesture of solidarity and by 10 November of that year Britain had convinced its EC counterparts, except Greece, to impose limited sanctions on Syria.

The American administration, having launched a massive air-raid on the Libyan cities of Tripoli and Benghazi on 15 April in retaliation for alleged Libyan complicity in terrorist activities, did not fail to caution Syria. On 24 April Reagan announced that he would not rule out military retaliation against Syria (and Iran) if they could be linked to terrorist acts. And the same theme was reiterated a day

later by George Shultz, who, whilst denying the existence of concrete plans for attack on Syria (and Iran), emphasized his country's determination to employ force against countries connected with terrorism.⁶

With its main Middle Eastern ally beset by domestic problems and facing a concerted diplomatic onslaught by the West as well as the risk of military confrontation with Israel, Moscow felt able to pursue a regional policy with no reference to Damascus's wishes, and to put pressure on Syria in an attempt to bring it into line with Soviet objectives. Accordingly, Gorbachev made clear to Asad both his reluctance to support Syria's quest for 'strategic parity' with Israel and his dissatisfaction with the continued Syrian-Palestinian and Syrian-Iraqi rifts. Not force and brinkmanship should guide Syria's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict, he argued, but, rather, moderation and the pursuit of a negotiated settlement that would end the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict.

This position was apparently clarified to Asad during his first meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in June 1985. Judging from the Soviet description of the talks, the two parties were at odds on virtually every single regional issue. For one, despite their concern with the intensifying dialogue between Arafat and King Hussein, the Soviets did not fail to criticize the continued rift between Asad and Arafat which, in their view, threatened the internal integrity of the resistance movement: 'During the exchange of views on questions concerning the state of affairs in the Palestinian resistance movement, the Soviet side laid heavy emphasis on the importance of preserving the Palestinian Liberation Organization's unity and of quickly overcoming differences among the Palestinians on a fundamentally anti-imperialist platform'.⁷

In addition, the Soviets were reported to have pressured the Syrians to scale down their support for Iran (in March 1985 Iranian forces almost breached Iraq's line of defence and were repelled with great effort by the Iraqis) and to restrain their allied Amal militia in Lebanon.⁸ Last but not least, Asad apparently failed to obtain Soviet agreement to supply Syria with a new generation of weaponry, the MiG-29 fighting aircraft in particular. Thus, although the military issue was clearly on the bilateral agenda (as evident from the presence of the Syrian and Soviet ministers of defence at the discussions), the Soviet media failed to mention any promises given to Syria in the military sphere; instead they confined themselves to the vague for-

mula that 'the desire to continue strengthening and deepening Soviet-Syrian ties was reaffirmed'.⁹

Another salient demonstration of both Moscow's wariness with Asad's *modus operandi*, and its growing reluctance to take risks on Damascus's behalf was provided by the Soviet behaviour during the second missile and the El-Al bombing crises. On both occasions the USSR found itself, not unlike previous crises, in the awkward position of having to choose between its desire to appear as the staunch supporter of the Arab cause and its fear of escalation; between the anxiety to deny the West, in particular the United States, any gains, and its reluctance to risk a superpower confrontation. The outcome was the tried combination of vocal endorsement of the Syrian stand and avoidance of clear and unequivocal commitment to Damascus.

Thus, Moscow justified the deployment of surface-to-air missiles along the Syrian border on grounds of 'self-defence and the protection of Syria's ally, sovereign Lebanon', describing the Israeli (and American) demand for the withdrawal of the missiles as an 'impudent interference in Syria's internal affairs [reflecting] the imperial aspirations of Washington and Tel Aviv'.¹⁰ Yet it took much care not to give any indication of readiness to support Damascus militarily should the crisis escalate into an open conflagration. The Soviet media did not mention the introduction of Syrian missiles into Lebanon, stating that the deployment of missiles took place within Syria's national borders.¹¹ It is possible that this omission meant to serve as both an implicit criticism of Syria's decision to challenge Israel in Lebanon and a delineation of the geographical limits of Soviet support for Syria.

More significantly, the Soviets avoided any allusion to the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty. The only reference to the Treaty throughout the crisis came in the form of an interview given to the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Watan* on 29 December 1985 by the deputy chief of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, Karen Brutents, who at the time was on a visit to Kuwait: 'I would like to remind you that we stand by Syria, with whom we have a treaty of cooperation, and we observe the spirit and the text of the treaty. Thus Syria will not be alone in face of any Israeli aggression'. Yet, as a salient exception to the otherwise extremely cautious tone of Soviet references to the crisis, Brutents's pledge of support only served to highlight the ambiguity of Moscow's commitment to Syrian security.

An equally circumspect approach was adopted by the Soviets during the even more explosive crisis following the El-Al incident. During that crisis not only did the Soviet media refrain from any mention of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty but they took care to stress that 'Syria, as its leaders have said, has enough power to defend its sovereignty and independence'.¹²

Even the most notable manifestation of Soviet support for Damascus during the second crisis – namely, Vice-President Abd al-Khalim Khaddam's working visit to Moscow on 27–29 May 1986 – revealed the USSR's dilemma. Although Gorbachev warned that any strike against Syria would entail 'incalculable consequences',¹³ and although an agreement on increased arms supplies, including the delivery of the coveted MiG-29 aircraft was signed,¹⁴ the Soviets put pressure on Syria to avoid escalation. They emphasized to Khaddam the futility of the resort to force and the need for 'a political settlement of regional conflicts through collective efforts'.¹⁵ They also clarified that the backing of Syria was not an exclusively Soviet, but primarily an all-Arab, responsibility. As the Soviet president, Andrei Gromyko, said in his dinner speech honouring Khaddam: 'In the USSR there is the conviction that if the Arabs succeed in ensuring unity in their ranks it would be an effective weapon resisting their enemies' intrigues'.¹⁶ Gorbachev is also said to have pointed out to Khaddam that, owing to the USSR's logistical and operational constraints, the burden for containing any 'lightning attack' on Syria would lie on Damascus's shoulders alone.¹⁷ Finally, the Soviets raised once again the issues clouding Soviet–Syrian relations, mainly the Asad–Arafat rift and Syria's support for Iran. This last issue was particularly urgent at the time given Iran's series of military successes, which, however limited, rekindled international fears of an Iranian victory in the Gulf War.¹⁸

Interestingly enough, neither Gorbachev's less forthcoming attitude towards Syria (the MiG-29s scheduled to arrive in late 1986 were not delivered before Asad undertook another visit to Moscow in April 1987), nor his attempts to court both the 'conservative' Arab regimes and Israel led to serious strains in Syrian–Soviet relations. On the contrary, throughout 1986 and 1987 Syria sought to highlight its cordial relations with the USSR and, moreover, took two important steps that complied with Moscow's wishes: namely, the *rapprochement* with Jordan and the intensification of its pronounced support for an international conference.

On 29 December 1985, after a series of preparatory contacts, King

Hussein arrived in Damascus for his first visit in a decade and in early 1986 he and Asad exchanged visits. The reconciliation, which resulted from both Jordanian disappointment with Yasser Arafat's tactics of procrastination and Hussein's awareness that any progress towards a settlement would require at least tacit Syrian approval, soon produced results. On 19 February 1986, Hussein announced his decision to end Jordan's partnership with the PLO and during that summer he closed down all of the 25 *Fath* offices that had been allowed to open in Jordan after the November 1984 Palestinian National Council in Amman.

The Syrian-Jordanian *rapprochement* was received by Moscow with considerable satisfaction.¹⁹ First, Hussein's move against the PLO forestalled Arafat's gradual shift towards an American-inspired solution based on the Reagan Plan and paved the way for the PLO to return to a 'progressive' approach. This was eventually achieved at the 18th session of the Palestinian National Council in Algiers in April 1987 when Arafat dissociated himself completely from the February 1985 agreement with Hussein. Second, the growing Syrian-Jordanian cooperation appeared to contain the seeds of a possible *rapprochement* between Syria and Iraq – something that the Jordanian King had worked hard to achieve. Despite the long-standing enmity between the Syrian and Iraqi leaderships (in 1986, Syria exploited King Hussein's attempts at mediation in order to manoeuvre Iran into augmenting its aid to Syria), some progress, if modest, was made in this direction, culminating in a meeting between Asad and the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, during the Amman Arab summit of November 1987.

Finally, having dropped the PLO from his peace efforts, King Hussein joined Syria in propagating the idea of an international conference on the Middle East. While the Jordanian perception of an international conference differed from that of the Soviet Union, the resurrection of the idea of such a conference among practically all the Arab states bordering Israel (Egypt included) was certainly a positive development from the Soviet point of view. Indeed, Syria's main contribution to Soviet Middle Eastern Policy at the time was its strong support for the proposed conference.²⁰

These developments, together with Syria's continued weakness, reduced Soviet apprehensions of a Syrian-inspired escalation and encouraged Moscow to respond to Damascus's military and economic needs. Thus, in contrast with Asad's 1985 Moscow visit, the second meeting between Asad and Gorbachev, on 23–25 April 1987,

bore concrete and positive fruit from the Syrian point of view. Firstly, it produced a series of bilateral agreements on technical and economic cooperation, including the development of Syria's phosphate and oil industries and the construction of the hydro-electric *Tishrin* Dam on the Euphrates. Secondly, Moscow reportedly agreed to reschedule Syria's \$15 billion debt and to conclude a new arms deal, which apparently included the contested MiG-29 aircraft promised to Khaddam a year earlier but withheld from Syria until then.²¹ within a couple of months of the visit, Syria received its first delivery of MiG-29s.²² Finally, the two parties reconfirmed their full resolve 'to continue strengthening their mutual trust, links at many levels and close relations which . . . are in the national interests of the Soviet and Syrian peoples . . .'.²³

That this statement reflected a real Soviet intention to warm up bilateral relations was shown by the flood of Soviet delegations to Damascus during the months following Asad's visit: in June 1987 alone Damascus hosted no fewer than five official Soviet guests, including Konstantin Katushev, chairman of the state committee for foreign economic relations, Arnold Ryuyte, deputy chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, and General Vladimir Lobov, first deputy chief of staff of the Soviet armed forces. In addition, on 22 July 1987 a Syrian cosmonaut took off on the space ship *Soyuz TM-3*. This event received much publicity in the two countries and was characterized by Mikhail Gorbachev as 'a striking page in the annals of the development and strengthening of Soviet-Syrian friendship'.²⁴

However, Gorbachev did not fail to indicate to Asad the tight strings attached to Moscow's support for Syria emphasizing that 'the reliance on military force in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict has completely lost its credibility'.²⁵ While this statement was partially directed towards Israel, and even though the belief itself had been preached by the Soviets to their Arab allies from the early 1970s onwards, the futility of reliance on military force was stressed by Gorbachev 'with more conviction and vigour than ever before'.²⁶ This view was supported by a joint communiqué on the importance of the 'convocation of a fully-fledged international conference with full powers under the aegis of the UN', and by Gorbachev's reference to the abnormality of the absence of Soviet-Israeli diplomatic relations.²⁷

Nor did Gorbachev fail to mention Syria's relations with the PLO

and Iraq. During his dinner speech honouring Asad, he announced his satisfaction with the proceedings of the PNC's Algiers session, which took place at the same time as Asad's visit. This indirect criticism of the Syrian stance was apparently accompanied by covert pressures on Asad to mend the fences with Arafat. Similarly, Gorbachev expressed deep concern at the continuation of the Iran-Iraq War, emphasizing the 'unchanging position of the Soviet Union' regarding the need for a prompt ending to the conflict.²⁸

The Syrian position on these two issues was, naturally, more equivocal. On the face of it, Asad could draw a measure of comfort from Arafat's dissociation of himself from the February 1985 agreement; this had been a longstanding Syrian objective. But as the agreement was already an empty document, having been abrogated by King Hussein a year earlier, Asad viewed the move as an undesirable tactical development which rallied the PLO behind Arafat thereby rendering the subservience of the PLO to Syrian wishes a remote eventuality. Indeed, his fears seemed to be fully vindicated by the participation of two of Syria's supporters, George Habash and Naif Hawatma, at the PNC's session, against Damascus's wish and largely as a result of Soviet efforts.

Yet these issues were not allowed by Asad to lead to a confrontation with the Soviets. Hence, the joint communiqué contained the Soviet formula on the need 'to restore unity in the ranks of the Palestinian resistance movement on a principled, anti-imperialist platform'.²⁹ With regard to the Iran-Iraq conflict, Asad consented to a meeting with Saddam Hussein which took place in Jordan immediately upon Asad's return from Moscow.³⁰ Neither this meeting nor their meeting during the Amman summit reflected a fundamental change in Syria's attitude towards its perennial rival. Yet they provided another indication of Syria's growing dependence on the Soviet Union, which can be traced back to 1977.

Indeed, it was not long before Moscow's improved position *vis-à-vis* Damascus manifested itself in an increasingly high-handed policy towards Syria. Thus Asad's visit to Moscow was followed by outspoken Soviet criticism of the Syrian concept of 'strategic parity'. 'In our view', argued *Izvestiya's* Middle Eastern commentator, Konstantin Geyvendov, in an interview with the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Anba* on 12 September 1987, 'the talk about strategic parity aims at diverting attention from the question of achieving security and peace in the Middle East. . . . [It just] does not have any meaning'. And Vladimir

Vinogradov, a former Soviet ambassador to Egypt, Iran, and the Geneva conference, had an equally dismissive view of the Syrian quest for strategic parity:

I would like our Arab friends to get rid of a false psychological feeling that Israel is besieging them. In fact, the opposite is true. . . . I have always thought that the balance was, and still is, in favour of the Arabs. A quick look at the balance of power affirms this fact insofar as the size of population, the quantity and quality of arms, and the extent of the area are concerned.³¹

Moscow's growing criticism of the Syrian position on the Arab-Israeli conflict was paralleled by a significant leap in the perceptively-warming Soviet-Israeli relations. Although so far the Soviets have refrained from re-establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel, since early 1989 the Israeli consular delegation in Moscow has come to function as an embassy in everything but title; in January it was allowed to reoccupy the (Israeli-owned) old embassy building in Moscow and the scope of its activity has been expanded from the purely consular sphere to the political and diplomatic fields as well. More importantly, a direct diplomatic channel has been established between the Soviet and Israeli foreign offices.³² This development has been accompanied by a massive increase in the rate of Jewish immigration from the USSR (from approximately 20,000 in 1988 to some 750,000 that are expected to arrive during the 1990s) as well as by the evolution of bilateral tourism (some 20,000 Soviet Jews visited Israel in 1988 and 1989), trade, cultural/scientific and sports relations. In December 1988, to Moscow's obvious gratification, Israel returned to the USSR a hijacked Soviet plane which had made its way to Tel-Aviv. That same month, an Israeli rescue team arrived in Armenia to assist in the earthquake relief work there, an action which was repeated in June 1989, following the railway accident in the southern Urals.³³

To Damascus's growing exasperation, the intensification of Soviet-Israeli relations has involved a number of important Soviet concessions. In early 1988, for example, when Israel was exercising strong measures to stem the Palestinian uprising on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, the Soviets announced their willingness to re-establish diplomatic relations with Israel once a negotiations process on an Arab-Israeli settlement was underway within the framework of an international conference.³⁴ Reflecting a significant retreat

from Moscow's previous stance which had made the restoration of diplomatic relations conditional on Israel's agreement to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders, this pledge was reiterated in May 1988 by Gorbachev himself during his summit meeting with Reagan and has subsequently become the standard Soviet position.³⁵

The Soviets have also sought to mitigate the Likud's vehement opposition to the convocation of an international conference by softening their position on the issue. As early as 1987 they informed the -then Israeli foreign minister, Shimon Peres, of their readiness to drop the longstanding Soviet insistence on a 'coercive conference' and to accept instead a looser definition of the conference's powers which would allow for bilateral negotiations within this wider international framework. In order to bypass the Israeli refusal to negotiate with the PLO, they suggested that the Palestinian delegation may, with Palestinian consent, be part of a unified Arab delegation;³⁶ this last concession was particularly loathsome to the Syrians given their past failure to rally Soviet support behind the idea of a unified Arab delegation. When these Soviet displays of moderation failed to strike a responsive chord in Jerusalem, the USSR asked Israel to suggest alternative means for breaking the political stalemate in the Middle East.³⁷

A no less alarming development from the Syrian point of view has been the qualitative change in the tone of Soviet references to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In a complete departure from the traditional line which portrayed Israel as a proxy of world (in particular American) imperialism and emphasized Moscow's unequivocal identification with the Arab cause, from late 1988 and early 1989 the USSR has virtually adopted a *neutral* position on the Middle East conflict, *putting the Arab and Israeli causes on a par*:

For a long time Israeli leaders denied that the people of Palestine had national rights, and even the fact of its existence. The Palestinians responded by rigidity, linking the solution to their national problem to the liquidation of the State of Israel. Israel resorts to air raids against Palestinian refugee camps in neighbouring countries and to anti-Palestinian measures in Lebanon. The Palestinians in their turn did not refrain from *terrorism*, in the erroneous belief that 'all measures are good in a struggle'. The madness and *mutual* enmity spiralled and violence became a norm.³⁸

Consequently, according to this line of reasoning, *both parties* should

discard their outdated perception of the conflict as a zero-sum game and opt instead for '*a constructive balance of interests . . . which would provide assurance and guarantee of security for everyone, both for the Arab countries and Palestine, and for Israel. Otherwise, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to talk about peace in the Middle East*':

Peace can be durable if neither party to a settlement has a reason to believe itself a loser. Both parties have already lost a great deal – thousands upon thousands of human lives, considerable economic and social development. A settlement must allow them to feel that both sides have finally won, together and separately.³⁹

The price of peace, nevertheless, should not be paid by Israel alone. The Arabs could be expected to display political realism as well: 'The two sides to the conflict have sat on the fence, refusing to take the first step. Now it is no longer an option. . . . Both Israelis and Palestinians must renounce their rejectionist stance and reach a compromise solution'.⁴⁰

By way of injecting a measure of realism into the Arab position, the Soviets pressurized the PLO to recognize the existence of the State of Israel. In Arafat's official meeting with Gorbachev in April 1988, the first of its kind in five years, the Palestinian leader was told that Israel, too, had legitimate security concerns and was urged to recognize the Jewish state.⁴¹ Soviet pressures in this direction continued unabated after Arafat's visit and played a crucial role in the historical decision of the PLO in November–December 1988 to recognize Israel and to accept a two-states solution.⁴² Since then, the Soviets have repeatedly indicated their readiness to mediate between Israel and the PLO, offering Moscow as a possible site for a Palestinian–Israeli dialogue.⁴³

Had Moscow confined itself to these fundamental policy changes, Damascus would still have had weighty reasons for concern. However, from early 1988 onwards the Soviets have embarked on a no less disturbing course from the Syrian point of view by virtually *substituting the PLO for Damascus as their most prominent Middle Eastern ally* and backing the evolving moderate Arab bloc: Jordan, Egypt, the PLO, and Iraq.⁴⁴ This development has been accompanied by concrete expressions of Soviet indignation with Damascus's rejectionist stance. In a visit to Damascus in July 1988, the Soviet deputy foreign minister, Yuly Vorontsov, urged the Syrians to resume the dialogue with the PLO and emphasized Moscow's deter-

mination to 'actively contribute to the search for a just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on a *balance of interests among all sides*'.⁴⁵ A strongly-worded message from Gorbachev to Asad three months later reiterated the USSR's unequivocal rejection of the military option and called upon the Syrian leader to display greater openness towards a possible territorial compromise over the Golan Heights.⁴⁶ This message was apparently augmented by yet another slowdown in Soviet arms transfers to Syria, and a reduction in the number of Soviet advisers in the Syrian armed forces.⁴⁷

The Syrians dreaded the new signals emanating from Moscow. Unlike the PLO, which has been ready to adapt to the changing international atmosphere and to soften its positions,⁴⁸ the Syrians have not concealed their irritation with Gorbachev's 'new thinking' on the Middle East. 'Anyone remote from the region and taken in by the brilliance of the *détente* process can be dragged into the position of equating the aggressor and the victim of aggression', argued *Radio Damascus* on 16 December 1988. However, 'what is called the balance of interests cannot be achieved in the Middle East, where the nature of the problem and the conflict differs from other regional problems and conflicts'. Hence, in order to forestall a 'hasty operation that might not measure up to what the Arabs consider minimum accepted pan-Arab limits, an alert and dynamic stand is required, capable of dealing with the new international and regional situation'. And what policy could be more 'alert and dynamic' than that rejecting the PLO's 'capitulationist' recognition of Israel in late 1988 and inflicting a military blow, through the pro-Syrian Amal militia, at its strongholds in Lebanon? 'We do not ignore or belittle the importance of world public opinion', Asad commented sardonically on the PLO's recognition of Israel, 'but we will not allow ourselves to concede our rights for the sake of winning its support'. 'What is the use of asking others to support our legitimate rights', he reasoned, 'if we ourselves concede these rights'?⁴⁹

Yet there was precious little Asad could do to check the new political dynamics in the Middle East. As the 1980s were nearing their end, Damascus found itself weaker and more isolated than on any other occasion during the last two decades. After all, Syria's rise to prominence during the Asad years owed no less to regional developments, such as Egypt's reassessment of its leading role and Iraq's preoccupation with the Gulf War, than to Asad's political acumen; once this favourable conjuncture disappeared, Syria had to

reoccupy its 'real' place in the Arab world. With Saddam Hussein bent on avenging Syria for its anti-Iraqi policy during the eight-year Gulf War, the PLO well outside Syria's control, the situation in Lebanon chaotic, and Egypt back in the centre of inter-Arab politics,⁵⁰ Asad felt anxious to secure at least the image of Soviet support. He therefore authorized a significant expansion of Soviet naval facilities in Tartus in the summer of 1988, and in November that year dispatched Mustafa Tlas to Moscow in an attempt to improve bilateral relations.

In Moscow, however, Tlas was confronted with a cool, indifferent, perhaps even alienated attitude to Damascus's perceived needs. Not only did he fail to secure the smooth flow of Soviet arms to Syria, but he was lectured about the grave risks attending Syria's quest for strategic parity. Any expansion of Syria's military potential at this stage, the Soviets told Tlas, would only be counterproductive; it would further constrain Syria's dire economic position, provoke Israel into a preemptive attack, and frustrate the evolving political process in the Middle East. And in any event, argued the Soviets, there was no need for Syrian concern, given its Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the Soviet Union. Accordingly, instead of focusing on the consolidation of its military might, Damascus had better improve its relations with the moderate Arabs and collaborate with them in the pursuit of a political settlement. When the startled Tlas tried to check this 'onslaught' by criticizing the thaw in Soviet-Israeli relations, he was bluntly told that this development was extremely advantageous for Syria, since it injected a strong element of moderation into the Israeli psyche thereby reducing the risk of future military adventurism on its part.⁵¹

The same position was presented to the Syrians, though probably in a milder form during Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's visit to Damascus in February 1989. In his meetings with the Syrian leadership, Shevardnadze apparently reiterated the main article of belief in Moscow's 'new political thinking' on the Middle East, namely, the need to find a *balance of interests* between Israel and the Arabs; he also urged his hosts to recognize the newly-declared Palestinian state and to mend the fences with the PLO. In return he promised Asad that the question of the Golan Heights would figure prominently on the agenda of a future international conference on the Middle East.⁵²

The Syrians responded with uncharacteristic deference to the Soviet preachings. 'In the Middle East the methods of force have shown their bankrupt nature', said Farouq al-Shara as he reiterated Gorbachev's well-known theme, '[therefore] we think the USSR's

initiative is serving progress towards a Near East settlement'.⁵³ This, in turn, enabled Shevardnadze to suggest at the close of his Damascus visit that Syria was ready to end its regional isolation and to join the peace process.⁵⁴

As things turned out, Shevardnadze's prognosis proved to be somewhat premature. Neither his February 1989 mission to the Middle East nor a visit to Damascus a month later by the Soviet defence minister, Dimitry Yazov, the first of its kind since Andrei Grechko's visit to Syria in May 1972,⁵⁵ succeeded in elbowing the Syrians from their rejectionist stance.⁵⁶ Nor have these visits managed to bridge the widening Soviet-Syrian gap; in mid-1989 the bilateral relationship experienced yet another crisis following Moscow's opposition to Syria's heavy military pressure on the government of General Michel Aoun in Lebanon.⁵⁷

Thus, at the onset of the 1990s, Soviet-Syrian relations appear to be at one of their lowest ebbs in two decades: the Syrians dread Gorbachev's 'new political thinking' which, they believe, is bound to sacrifice the Arab cause for the sake of global *détente*. The Soviets, for their part, abhor Syria's sustained vehement opposition to the evolving moderation in the region. The existence of fundamental differences between these two allies was publicly acknowledged by Mustafa Tlas already in the autumn of 1987, a few months after Asad's visit to Moscow. On account of the Soviet Union being a global power with wide-ranging interests, he commented, 'we, in Syria, have our own strategy. That is why we do not agree with the Soviet Union in every respect'.⁵⁸

Another glaring illustration of the deep gap between Moscow and Damascus was offered on 16 December 1988 when a statement issued at the close of a visit by a Soviet parliamentary delegation to Damascus failed to bear any reference to the PLO's recognition of Israel which took place a couple of weeks earlier. That this abstention was not of Moscow's choosing was evidenced a day later when the same delegation visited Amman where the two parties 'noted with satisfaction that the latest constructive decisions made by the Palestinian National Council have created a favourable atmosphere for advancing the cause of a just Near East settlement'.⁵⁹

And the Soviet ambassador to Damascus, Alexander Zotov, has most recently provided an equally insightful glimpse into the poor state of the bilateral relationship by admitting with unprecedented frankness that 'it would be wrong to state that the views held by the two nations on the Middle East situation and the prospects for its settlement are identical'.⁶⁰

Conclusions

Under Mikhail Gorbachev, Moscow's traditional conception of the Middle East has turned a full circle: from regionalism to globalism; from a narrow perception of the regional balance of risks and opportunities to a more tolerant redefinition of Soviet security requirements in the Middle East and their subordination to global considerations. The fact that 'almost next door to the Soviet Union there is an unstable region chock-full of armaments with an aggregate military potential comparable with that of the main military blocs',¹ has not been lost on Moscow; however, instead of focusing on the direct adverse implications of this phenomenon, the Soviets now tend to view the Middle East problem as part of the wider challenge posed to Soviet security by Third World instability.

This attitudinal change is a direct corollary of Gorbachev's 'new political thinking' on international affairs. Predicated on the belief that today's world is 'contradictory, socially and politically diverse, but none the less interconnected and largely integral', the 'new political thinking' does not view East-West relations in zero-sum terms; instead it perceives them as a mixed-motive game, in which all actors 'resemble . . . a pack of mountaineers tied together by a climbing rope. They can either climb on together to the mountain peak or fall together into an abyss'. To be sure, 'economic, political and ideological competition between capitalist and socialist countries is [still] inevitable', but 'it can and must be kept within the framework of peaceful competition which necessarily envisages cooperation'. Such cooperation, in turn, should be based on a 'balance of interests' between states which recognizes 'the right of every nation to choose the path of its social development'.²

The most salient manifestation of the 'new thinking' in Moscow's Middle Eastern policy has been, of course, the withdrawal from Afghanistan, where, despite the grave risk to the survivability of a communist regime, the Soviets took a deliberate decision to allow the Afghans to sort out independently 'the path of their social development'. A year later the same approach was repeated in Eastern Europe, setting in train the collapse of the communist regimes there.

An equally compelling, though less visible, expression of the 'new political thinking' has been the growing and more outspoken Soviet willingness to recognize the legitimacy of Western interests in the

Middle East. 'We understand that under the present circumstances it is difficult to reconcile the interests of the conflicting sides', Gorbachev writes in his book *Perestroika*, 'however, we do not at all want the process of working towards a settlement, or the very goals of this process, in some way to infringe upon the interests of the United States and the West. We are not bent on elbowing the United States out of the Middle East – this is simply unrealistic. But the United States should not commit itself to unrealistic goals either. The main thing here is to take the interests of all sides into consideration'.³

This last strand of thinking is particularly conducive for super-power collaboration over the Arab–Israeli conflict. Since the Soviets deem this conflict to endanger the overall edifice of their 'new thinking' by 'potentially jeopardizing the life-asserting normalization process underway in Europe and Asia',⁴ they are anxious to advance immediately towards its resolution before 'the historic process of disarmament could grind to a halt because of a lack of movement in the Middle East'.⁵ And given the primacy of East–West *détente* in Gorbachev's strategy and his greater responsiveness to Western interests, Moscow could be expected to go to greater lengths than before in subordinating regional interests to global considerations. Indeed, as shown earlier, such a shift has been underway in the Middle East since the late 1980s.

The question should now be raised, whether and to what extent is this 'new thinking' on the Middle East entrenched in the Soviet cognitive framework. Is it resilient enough to endure the possible vicissitudes in Gorbachev's political fortune? More importantly, will it be able to outlive his term in office or even the fall of the Communist Party from power? In short, can the USSR be considered a reliable partner in a Middle East peace settlement? This question is especially important given the prevailing tendency among students of Soviet affairs, at least in the pre-Gorbachev era, to doubt Moscow's genuine interest in resolving the Arab–Israeli conflict. According to this school of thought, the USSR is interested not so much in promoting peace as it is in extending its influence over the Middle East; and since the Arab–Israeli conflict forms the main avenue through which the USSR has managed to penetrate the Middle East, the perpetuation of this feud, though at a low level, is essential for the maintenance of Soviet regional standing and influence. As a long-time American observer of Middle Eastern affairs put it:

In the final analysis, there is an underlying a-symmetry between

American and Soviet interests, objectives and relationships in the Middle East. American interests will be best served by an end of the Arab–Israeli conflict. So long as that conflict continues, it creates tension between America’s commitment to Israel and its needs, for strategic and other reasons, to maintain the best possible relations with key Arab countries or, at a minimum, to prevent their falling under Soviet domination. . . . The Soviets share with the United States an interest in avoiding eruptions of Arab–Israeli hostilities, which have generally constituted military setbacks for their Arab friends, which can produce unpredictable chain reactions potentially detrimental to Soviet interests and which raise the risk of US–Soviet confrontation. On the other hand, the Soviets have at times gained political advantage from the existence of Arab–Israeli tensions. They have never felt the kind of incentive the United States has to invest political capital in a peaceful settlement which could diminish the need for their support among the Arabs.⁶

The record of Soviet–Syrian relations during the last two decades seems to belie these assertions. It illustrates that, in spite of the fundamental difference between the worldview and tactics of Gorbachev and those of his predecessors, the overriding concern of Soviet Middle Eastern policy from Brezhnev to Gorbachev (with the qualified exception of Andropov’s brief period in power when the tide of events forced the USSR to be more supportive of Syria’s vigorous course) has remained essentially unchanged, namely, *the attainment and preservation of stability*. In the sphere of the Arab–Israeli conflict, as in the realm of inter-Arab politics, the Soviets have advocated restraint and moderation to Syria, emphasizing the advantages of a negotiated settlement over the military option. Thus, in almost every visit paid by Asad to the USSR – even at times when the USSR was in a weak position *vis-à-vis* Syria (e.g. the April 1974 and 1977 visits) – the Soviets made clear their disapproval of Syria’s rejection of the legitimacy of Israel by emphasizing the latter’s right to a secure existence. This disapproval has been carried a significant step forward by the ‘balance of interests’ – a concept which not only recognizes the legitimacy of Israel’s security concerns but also equates its cause with that of the Arabs.

Moreover, whenever the Soviets have deemed Syria’s actions to endanger regional stability, they have applied pressure on Damascus and shown their dissatisfaction with Syrian behaviour, even at the

risk of a confrontation with this extremely important ally. These efforts have ranged from the Soviet success in May 1973 in persuading Asad to postpone the planned war so as to give diplomacy a chance to the less successful efforts, in 1973–4, to bring Syria to the Geneva conference; from the abortive attempt in 1976 to curb Syria's military intervention in Lebanon to the restraining behaviour during the various Syrian–Israeli crises in the late 1970s and early 1980s; to Gorbachev's frank words with Asad during the April 1987 visit and his subsequent attempts to drive Syria towards a negotiated settlement by manipulating arms supplies and courting Israel and the moderate Arab actors. Incidentally, Syria has not been the only Arab factor to experience Moscow's anxiety in a peace settlement: as early as November 1979, six months after the conclusion of the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty, the Soviets tried to bring the PLO into the political process by pressurizing Arafat to recognize Israel.⁷ More formidable Soviet pressures in this direction were applied on the PLO in 1988, this time with far greater success.

This historical record indicates that while Gorbachev has been the first Soviet leader to candidly recognize the legitimacy of Western interests in the Middle East, his predecessors' perception of great-power competition in zero-sum terms did not imply disregard for the state of *détente*. Similarly, Gorbachev's (potential) readiness to co-exist with a non-communist regime in Afghanistan is no recent phenomenon. As mentioned earlier in this book, from its very inception the USSR has been willing to acquiesce to the existence of non-communist regimes along its southern borders and even to collaborate with them whenever the need arose. The Afghanistan invasion should therefore be viewed as the exception to this behavioural pattern, rather than the rule.

Nor is the disillusionment with the political utility of military force of Gorbachev's own making. Already in the early 1960s the Soviets tried to convince Israel of the futility of armed force in inter-state relations⁸ and this theme was reiterated on numerous later occasions, most recently by Leonid Brezhnev during the 1982 Lebanon War. 'The bitter experience of decades of acts of aggression and military conflict has shown that *the course of armed confrontation . . . has not brought and cannot bring a settlement of the Middle East problems*', he said. 'They can only be solved as a result of the collective efforts of all interested parties'.⁹

More than anything, this policy reflects a clear recognition that following the transformation of the Arab–Israeli conflict into the

main lodestone of great-power intervention in the Middle East, this conflict has outlived its usefulness to Soviet Middle Eastern interests. It has compelled the USSR to commit an increasing amount of resources to the area without tangible gains, and has put it on a collision track with the United States, thereby affecting adversely the broader structure of superpower relations. It is true of course that 'in the mid-1950s the Arab-Israeli dispute provided the point of entry for Soviet policy in the Middle East'; however, 'in the late 1970s and beyond it provided the apparent point of exit'.¹⁰ Moreover, it should be kept in mind that Soviet presence in the region has never been an end in itself, rather a means to promote Soviet security by eliminating external intervention in the Middle East and cultivating a favourable local environment. This goal can best be achieved by neutralizing potential sources of instability the most volatile of which is the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the words of Edward Shevardnadze:

Let us frankly admit that some people still think that the great powers are not so much worried about the absence of settlement in the Middle East. After all, it is said, they earn not a small amount of money supplying weapons to the region and do not care much about what happens next.

I would like to say, at least on behalf of my country, that this is not true. Upheavals in the Middle East have always greatly affected us. The Soviet people are particularly sensitive to all that happens here, for tensions in this region cost us dearly in all respects including financial.¹¹

At the dawn of a new decade, Soviet interest in Middle Eastern stability appears more intense than ever due to the severe risks posed to the political and territorial integrity of the Soviet Socialist Republic by the surge of nationalistic and religious feelings in its southern republics. Given the not-too-unlikely eventuality that some of these republics will (successfully) opt for secession from the USSR, the Russians may be confronted, for the first time in three centuries, with the shift of their border with the Middle East northwards. One could only hope that now, when the USSR's days as a superpower may be numbered, an over-triumphant state of mind will not lure the West to ignore Soviet (or for that matter Russian) interests along its rimland in general, and in the Middle East in particular.

Notes

Introduction

1. The only other Third World area in close proximity to the USSR is South-East Asia; however, unlike the Middle East, this area is not directly contiguous to the Soviet border, but separated from it by China.
2. A. L. Horelick, 'Soviet Policy in the Middle East', in P. Y. Hammond and S. S. Alexander (eds), *Political Dynamics in the Middle East* (New York: American Elsevier, 1972) p. 559.
3. E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) vol. III, p. 464.
4. B. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 265.
5. Y. Primakov, *Anatomy of the Middle East Conflict* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979) p. 145.
6. Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Documents on International Affairs, 1955* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) p. 303.
7. P. Seale, *The Struggle for Syria* (London: Oxford University Press for the RIIA, 1965) p. 234.
8. Ibid. According to Seale, it was Syria rather than Egypt which broke the Western monopoly of arms supplies to the Middle East by signing in 1954 a small arms deal with Czechoslovakia.
9. For a description of Soviet support for Syria during the 1957 crisis see, for example, W. Z. Laqueur, *The Soviet Union and the Middle East* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1959) pp. 247–64; Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, pp. 289–302; J. McConnell, 'Doctrine and Capabilities', in B. Dismukes and J. McConnell (eds), *Soviet Naval Diplomacy* (New York: Pergamon, 1979) pp. 7–10.
10. Horelick, *Soviet Policy in the Middle East*, p. 574.
11. G. Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1971) p. 110.
12. See, for example, L. Viktorov, 'Ba'thisti na Sluzhbe Reactsii', *Sovremenni Vostok*, January 1960, pp. 27–8.
13. G. Mirsky, 'The Changing Arab East', *New Times*, No. 2, 15 January 1964, p. 3.
14. See below p. 33.
15. See below, p. 180.

1 Moscow and Damascus: A Patron–Client Relationship?

1. M. Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London: Frank Cass, 1971) pp. 132–5. To be sure, there are those who, by adopting the so-called 'client-centric' approach, emphasize the bargaining power of the client *vis-à-vis* the patron and go so far as to include cases of unilateral dependence of the patron on the client within the *patron–client*

paradigm. Such views, nevertheless, fail to comprehend the essence and inner meaning of the concept of patron (or alternatively, client) which, originating in the Latin *pater* implies preponderance, authority, and seniority. Hence, any interrelationship, clearly favouring the weaker partner *ipso facto* falls within the boundaries of the *power of the weak*, or the *tail wags the dog* paradigm.

2. S. Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles, Or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968) pp. 39, 53.
3. P. Ramet, 'The Soviet-Syrian Relationship', *Problems of Communism*, September-October 1986, p. 46.
4. D. Pipes, 'Syria: The Cuba of the Middle East?', *Commentary*, July 1986, pp. 16-17.
5. R. O. Freedman, 'Moscow, Damascus and the Lebanon Crisis', in M. Ma'oz and A. Yaniv (eds), *Syria Under Asad* (New York: St. Martin's Press) p. 243.
6. A. Z. Rubinstein (ed.), *Soviet and Chinese Influence in the Third World* (New York: Praeger, 1975) p. 10.
7. P. Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988) pp. 185-6.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
9. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 22 February 1971. For further references to the supremacy of the armed struggle see Asad's interview with the Bulgarian Communist Party organ *Rabotnichenko Delo*, 2 February 1971; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 8 March 1971; Asad's interview with *al-Anwar* (Beirut), 10 August 1972.
10. *Radio Moscow in English*, 4, 6 April 1973.
11. As early as 18 February 1973 Nixon received a message from Brezhnev which sought to impress upon him the imminence of war and the consequent urgency of a political initiative. Similar warnings were also conveyed to Kissinger three months later, during his discussions at Zavidovo. See, H. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982) pp. 209-10, 296.
12. Y. Ben-Porat, 'The Yom Kippur War: A Mistake in May and a Surprise in October', *Ma'arachot*, No. 299 (July-August 1985) pp. 2, 6 (Hebrew). This article draws on classified information, not released before.
13. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 296, 461.
14. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 9 June 1973.
15. M. Ma'oz, *Syria Under Hafiz al-Asad: New Domestic and Foreign Policies* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1975) p. 24.
16. The best example, perhaps, of Moscow's attempts to alarm public opinion to the imminence of war is afforded by Gromyko's speech at the UN General Assembly on 25 September 1973, in which he stressed the urgency of a political settlement for the Arab-Israeli conflict (*Pravda*, 26 September 1973). See also, *Izvestiya*, 5 October 1973; *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 13 September 1973; *TASS*, 4 September, 4 October 1973.
17. For a detailed account of Soviet covert warnings conveyed to the US administration see E. Karsh, 'Moscow and the Yom Kippur War: A Reappraisal', *Soviet-Jewish Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1986) pp. 14-17.

18. According to this resolution, a just and lasting peace in the Middle East was to be established on the basis of the following principles:
 - (i) Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.
 - (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.

The resolution also affirmed the necessity for guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area; for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem, as well as for ensuring the territorial inviolability and political independence of every state in the area through various measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones.

19. See, for example, *Pravda*, 18 February, 6, 21 June, 19 August 1968; *Izvestiya*, 2 February 1968.
20. L. Whetten, *The Canal War: Four Power Conflict in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MASS.: MIT Press, 1974) pp. 47, 54.
21. *Jerusalem Post*, 17 February 1989.
22. Soviet Government Statement on the Middle East, *TASS*, 28 April 1976; Soviet proposal concerning a Middle East settlement, *TASS*, 1 October 1976.
23. For further discussion of this point see below, pp. 76–7.
24. For Syria's view of the Arab–Israeli conflict see, for example, Asad's interview with *al-Nahar* (Beirut), 17 March 1971; speech on Lebanon, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 20 July 1976; interview for the Kuwaiti press, as broadcast by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 13 December 1981; interview with *Liberation* (Paris), 14 February 1986; his speeches on the anniversary of the Ba'th revolution as brought by *Damascus Domestic Service* on 8 March 1988, 1989 and 1990.
- See also Vice-President Khaddam's interview with *Monday Morning* (Beirut), 14–20 May 1979; comments on the conflict, as cited by the *Syrian Arab News Agency* (SANA), 4 February 1978; Vice-President Zuhair Mashariqa's interviews with *al-Ba'th*, 24 January 1987, 8 March 1987; Farouq al-Shara's interview with *Damascus Domestic Service*, 31 May 1989. See also statement of the 13th National Congress of the Ba'th Party, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 25 August 1980.
25. R. A. Hinnebusch, 'Revisionist Dreams, Realist Strategies: The Foreign Policy of Syria', in B. Korany and A. E. Hillal Dessouki (eds), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1984) p. 294; Khaddam's interview with *Monday Morning*, 14–20 May 1979.
26. *Ibid.*; Khaddam as cited by SANA, 4 February 1978.
27. Mashariqa's interview with *al-Ba'th*, 8 March 1987.
28. Asad's Ramadan Address, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 13 May 1988.
29. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 4 August 1975 (emphasis added).
30. *Ibid.*, 8 March 1974.

31. Seale, *Asad*, p. 283.
32. Asad's interview with *al-Rai al-Amm*, as brought by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 13 December 1981.
33. Mashariqa's interview with *al-Ba'th*, 18 March 1987.
34. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 29 October 1973.
35. *New York Times*, 3 January 1974; *Financial Times*, 3 January 1974; *Le Monde*, 19 January 1974.
36. *Guardian*, 23 January 1974; *New York Times*, 4 February 1974.
37. See below, pp. 82–3.
38. For an elaborate discussion of Gorbachev's strategy towards Syria see Chapter 10.
39. See below, pp. 176–7.
40. *Yediot Acharonot* (Tel Aviv), 19 January 1990; *The Independent* 19 March 1990.
41. *Egyptian Gazette*, 13 June 1976.
42. See, for example, *TASS*, 6, 7, 8 July 1976 (Khaddam's visit); *Beirut Domestic Service*, 25 July 1976; *Financial Times*, 9 August 1976 (Kuznetsov's visit).
43. *Le Monde*, 20 July 1976 (emphasis added).
44. *Financial Times*, 9, 10 August 1976; *INA* (Baghdad) 15 July 1976.
45. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 10 July 1976.
46. *Ibid.*, 18, 20 June 1976.
47. *Ibid.*, 1 July 1976.
48. *Ibid.*, 12 August 1976.
49. *Ibid.*, 12 October 1976.
50. The Soviet peace initiative was made public on 1 October 1976. The extent of Soviet interest in mobilizing Syrian support for this plan was shown by the talks held by Vladimir Vinogradov in Damascus in September. For Vinogradov's visit see *Financial Times*, 22 September 1976.
51. *New York Times*, 2 October 1986.
52. See, for example, *Pravda*, 7, 27 December 1976.
53. Interestingly enough, the statement summarizing Kadoumi's visit bore no reference to Syria's military intervention, nor did it contain a demand for Syrian withdrawal. See *Pravda*, 18 September 1976.
54. *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 30 September 1976.
55. See, for example, *TASS*, 2, 10 October 1976; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 3 October 1976; *Pravda*, 3, 7 October 1976.
56. See, for example, *Pravda*, 14, 17 October 1976; *Radio Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 18 October 1976.
57. Y. Tsaplin, 'Teaming Up', *New Times*, No. 48 (1976) p. 23.
58. The arms embargo, however, was not lifted until Asad threatened to cancel the limited port services rendered to the Soviets in Tartus. Only then, in early 1977 were arms shipments to Syria restored to their full extent in accordance with previously signed agreements, thereby clearing the road for Soviet–Syrian reconciliation. See, E. Karsh, *Soviet Arms Transfers to the Middle East in the 1970s* (Tel Aviv: The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1983), JCSS Paper No. 22, pp. 13–14.
59. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 24 August 1982; *Radio Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 20 July 1982 (emphasis added). For further ex-

- pressions of Soviet justification of Syria's Lebanese role see, for example, *Pravda*, 3 August 1982; *Izvestiya*, 26 August 1982; *TASS*, 26 June 1982; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 2 July 1982; *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 8 August 1982.
60. *Pravda*, 29 December 1985. For an elaborate discussion of the two crises see below, pp. 167–8.
 61. J. D. Singer and M. Small, 'Formal Alliances 1835–1939', in R. Friedman *et al.* (eds), *Alliances in International Politics* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1970) p. 149.
 62. The only exception to this pattern is the Soviet–Iranian Friendship and Cooperation Treaty of 1921, which envisages the possibility of Soviet intervention in Iran in certain circumstances. The uniqueness of this treaty lies, undoubtedly, in Iran's direct contiguity to the USSR. Indeed, there is a striking similarity between the Soviet–Iranian treaty and the Soviet–Finnish treaty of 1948.
 63. *Soviet–Syrian Treaty*, Article 6.
 64. The request was made during Grechko's visit to Damascus. See, *International Herald Tribune*, 13 May 1972.
 65. See, *Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA)*, 6 August 1972; Asad's interview with *al-Anwar*, 10 August 1972 and with *al-Rai al-Amm* (Kuwait), 18 October 1975.
 66. Asad's interview with *al-Rai al-Amm*, 18 October 1975.
 67. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 8 March 1980.
 68. *Financial Times*, 8 September 1978.
 69. *Al-Mustaqbal* (Paris), 16 December 1978.
 70. See, for example, *al-Bayraq*, 21 July 1980; *al-Hawadith* (Beirut), 3 October 1980; *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), 18 November 1980.
 71. The last Soviet attempt to persuade Syria to sign a bilateral treaty was made during Asad's visit to Moscow in October 1978. See below pp. 186–8.
 72. On Asad's October 1979 visit see below, pp. 39, 122–3.
 73. See, for example, *Pravda*, 17 February, 17 March, 17 April, 17 June, 13 July 1980; *Izvestiya*, 3, 6 June 1980; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 11 June 1980; *TASS*, 17, 21 March, 23 September 1980; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 7 March 1980.
 74. Handel, *Weak States*, p. 135.

2 Soviet–Syrian Relations: the Military Dimension

1. The data presented in this book regarding Soviet military support constitute an aggregate based upon a rather wide variety of sources. I have therefore generally avoided indicating specific references. Apart from numerous press reports, military journals, etc., the main primary sources used here are the yearbooks of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies – *Strategic Survey*, and *The Military Balance*; publications of the Stockholm-based Institute for Peace Research (SIPRI): the annual *World Armament and Disarmament*, as well as *The Arms Registers* and *The Arms Trade with the Third World* (1971); US,

- CIA, *Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries, 1979 and 1954–79* (Washington DC, 1980); US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers* (various editions). Another useful source has been the year-book of The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (Tel Aviv), *Middle East Military Balance*.
2. In the first half of the 1980s, sub-Saharan Africa received Soviet military support totalling \$6075 billion, East Asia \$4950 billion and Latin America \$4150 billion.
 3. This classification is borrowed from my chapter: 'Peacetime Presence and Wartime Engagement: The Soviet Case', in S. Spiegel *et al.* (eds), *The Soviet-American Competition in the Middle East* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1988) pp. 145–58.
 4. *Ma'ariv* (Tel Aviv), 12 January 1990.
 5. See, for example, Asad's interview with *Daily Telegraph*, 17 March 1969.
 6. See, for example, *al-Nahar* (Beirut), 23 March 1969.
 7. Karsh, *Soviet Arms Transfers*, p. 24.
 8. Seale, *Asad*, p. 192.
 9. See, for example, Asad's interview with *al-Bayraq* (Beirut), 5 December 1972.
 10. See, for example, *Le Monde*, 26 September 1973. According to *Le Monde*, the restrictions on the movement of Soviet advisers were imposed following Soviet decline of a Syrian request for MiG-23s, made in the wake of the 13 September 1973 air battle with Israel. The raising of such a request three weeks before the outbreak of hostilities, nevertheless, seems most unlikely: had the Soviets agreed to supply these planes, the Syrian air force would have been incapable of operating them during the war.
 11. This minimum time period reflects a clear Soviet reluctance to expose its state-of-the-art weaponry too prematurely. The withholding of the SCUD missiles, though, was also related to the situation in the Middle East, namely, to Moscow's reluctance to upset the Syrian–Israeli balance of deterrence. For, while in the Egyptian terrain such missiles could only be employed for purely tactical purposes (due to the problem of range), Syria could use them against targets in the Israeli heartland.
 12. The overall order of battle of the Syrian ground forces, though, grew by only one division, since one of the two additional armoured divisions was previously a mechanized one. Thus, by mid-1982, the Syrian army comprised four armoured and two mechanized divisions, as compared with two and three respectively in 1979.
 13. The assessment of the size of the Soviet advisory mission in Syria throughout the study is made independently, on the basis of the size of the Syrian armed forces, the intensity of advisory penetration, as well as the quantities of weapons absorbed.
 14. C. Roberts, 'Soviet Arms-transfer Policy and the Decision to Upgrade Syrian Air Defences', *Survival*, July–August 1983, p. 155.
 15. Figures include war replacements.
 16. Arriving in January and October 1983 respectively, the SA-5s and SS-21s were initially operated by independent Soviet units. By mid-1985, having

- completed the transfer of these weapons systems to the Syrians, the Soviet units, totalling some 2000 troops, left Syria. See, *International Herald Tribune*, 5 January, 9, 23 February, 10 October 1983; *Foreign Report* (London), 17 November 1983; *Daily Telegraph*, 9 May 1985; *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 11, 25 May 1985.
17. Seale, *Asad*, p. 399.
 18. *The Middle East Balance, 1986* (Tel Aviv) p. 177.
 19. *The Military Balance, 1986–1987* (London: The IISS, 1987) p. 109.
 20. S. S. Roberts, 'The October 1973 Arab–Israeli War', in B. Dismukes and J. McConnell (eds), *Soviet Naval Diplomacy*, p. 208.
 21. P. Jabber and R. Kolkowicz, 'The Arab–Israeli Wars of 1967 and 1973', in S. Kaplan (ed.), *Diplomacy of Power* (Washington DC: Brookings, 1981) p. 449.
 22. B. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p. 134; J. Glassman, *Arms for the Arabs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975) p. 134.
 23. Glassman, *ibid*.
 24. Roberts, *The October 1973 Arab–Israeli War*, pp. 196, 201.
 25. B. Kalb and M. Kalb, *Kissinger* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974) p. 470.
 26. C. Herzog, *The War of Atonement* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975) p. 136; Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, *The Yom Kippur War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) p. 409.
 27. Insight Team, *ibid*.
 28. Herzog, *The War of Atonement*, p. 136.
 29. G. D. Ra'anani, *The Evolution of the Soviet Use of Surrogates in Military Relations in the Third World, with Particular Emphasis on Cuban Participation in Africa* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1979) p. 37.
 30. *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), 16 June 1982; *Ma'ariv* (Tel Aviv), 28 June 1982; *Al-Hamishmar* (Tel Aviv), 9 June 1982.
 31. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 13 June 1982; *ONA* (Doha), 15 June 1982.
 32. *Israeli Television*, 24 June 1982.
 33. *Ma'ariv*, 8 April 1983.
 34. See, for example, G. Ofer, 'The Economic Burden of Soviet Involvement in the Middle East', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3 (January 1973) pp. 329–47.
 35. *New York Times*, 28 August 1988; *Ha'aretz*, 29 August 1988.
 36. E. Karsh, 'Soviet Arms for the Love of Allah', *U.S. Naval Institute: Proceedings*, vol. 110 (April 1984) p. 49.
 37. A. Z. Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) pp. 335–6.
 38. International Affairs Guest Club, 'The USSR and the Third World', *International Affairs* (Moscow) 12 (1988) p. 139.
 39. On this issue see, M. Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan* (London: Collins, 1975) pp. 86–7, 89.
 40. A clear illustration of Moscow's eagerness to cut down the political and economic costs of its military support for Damascus has been afforded most recently by the above-mentioned drastic reduction in the number of Soviet advisers in Syria.

3 The Economics of Soviet Policy Toward Syria

1. Lenzowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East*, p. 123.
2. For the liberalization measures see, *Middle East Economic Digest* (MEED), 5 February 1971, p. 151; 4 February 1972, pp. 135–6; 17 March 1972, pp. 307–8; 23 June 1972, pp. 695–6; 29 March 1974, pp. 368–9; 17 May 1974, p. 578.
3. *Middle East News Agency* (Cairo) (hereinafter – MENA), 9 March 1974; *Middle East Journal*, vol. 28, no. 33 (1974) p. 297.
4. TASS, 2 November 1972 (Wannus's statement); *Radio Moscow in Arabic* 16 November 1972 (Khulayfawi's statement).
5. TASS, 27 October 1972.
6. MEED, 30 January 1976, p. 24; 27 August 1976, p. 22; 10 June 1977, p. 39; 9 November 1979, p. 47.
7. TASS, 12 April 1976; MEED, 27 August 1976, p. 22.
8. Article 8 in the bilateral treaty.
9. MEED, 17 October 1980, p. 7.
10. MEED, 28 October 1983, p. 57; SANA, 23 May 1983.
11. The analysis of Syria's economic predicament draws largely on E. Kanovsky, *What's Behind Syria's Current Economic Problems?* (Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre, 1985). See also: MEED, 21 December 1979, p. 69; 1 February 1980, p. 36; 22 February 1980, p. 34; 8 June 1984, pp. 36–7; 1 June, 3 August 1985; MEED *Annual Review*, 31 December 1976, pp. 53–5; *International Herald Tribune*, 19 October 1982, 4 December 1986; *Financial Times*, 24 January 1983, 12 February, 24 December 1985, 2 June 1986, 1 April 1987; *Jerusalem Post*, 21 January 1985; *Guardian*, 30 October 1986.
12. *Foreign Report* (London), 22 November 1984, pp. 7–8. The USSR's insistence on Syrian repayment of its military debt can also be partially inferred from the balance of bilateral trade, which in 1982–3 showed about \$250 million surplus of Syrian exports to the USSR.
13. As shown in Chapter 10 this pledge has been virtually evaded due to Gorbachev's renewed efforts from late 1988 onwards to force Syria into moderation.
14. Syria's finance minister, Nur-Allah Nur-Allah, as cited by MEED, 24 December 1971, p. 1494; MEED, 21 December 1979, p. 69.

4 The Formative Years, 1970–73

1. Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East*, p. 114.
2. J. Pennar, *The USSR and the Arabs: The Ideological Dimension* (London: C. Hurst, 1973) pp. 109–110.
3. *Guardian*, 19 June 1969.
4. *Pravda*, 5 March 1969.
5. *Al-Nida* (Beirut), 22 March 1969; *L'Humanité* (Paris), 7 March 1969 (emphasis added).
6. Beirut RNS in Arabic, 23 March 1969, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (hereinafter – FBIS), 25 March 1969, p. F3.
7. *Al-Jaridah* (Beirut), 24 March 1969.

8. See, for example, *Trud*, 18 July 1970.
9. In an interview with the British journalist, Patrick Seale, a decade later, Asad revealed that he did not commit the air force into battle because of his fear of escalation. According to Seale, not only did Asad support the Syrian invasion of Jordan, but he virtually initiated this move. There is, however, no evidence to substantiate Seale's version. See, Seale, *Asad*, pp. 158–60.
10. Thus, for example, the Soviets had withdrawn their advisers from the Syrian units before the latter crossed the border and notified the Americans of their action. Surprisingly, this measure was interpreted by Henry Kissinger as implying Soviet encouragement for the Syrian move. Yet even he was convinced during the crisis that the Soviets were interested in de-escalation and were doing their best to contain Syria. See, Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979) pp. 616–17, 627, 631.
11. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 16 November 1970.
12. *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 18 November 1970.
13. For Soviet and Syrian accounts of Asad's visit see, TASS, 3 February 1971; *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 1, 3 February 1971; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 31 January, 2, 3 February 1971; *Izvestiya*, 30 January 1971; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 3 February 1971. For Western accounts see: *The Times*, 2, 4 February 1971; *International Herald Tribune*, 5 February 1971; *New York Times*, 2 February 1971; *Financial Times*, 2 February 1971; *Jerusalem Domestic Service*, 7 February 1971.
14. See Asad's interview with *al-Nahar* (Beirut), 17 March 1971.
15. TASS, 10 May 1971. For further Soviet praise for the Syrian regime see: TASS, 7 March 1971; *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 18 November 1971.
16. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 30 March 1971.
17. K. Dawisha, *Soviet Foreign Policy towards Egypt* (London: Macmillan, 1979) p. 62.
18. TASS, 26 February, 13 May 1972; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 16 May 1972; *Pravda*, 15 May 1972; *Financial Times*, 15 May 1972; *New York Times*, 15 May 1972; *Guardian*, 11 May 1972 (Grechko's visit); G. Golan, *Yom Kippur and After* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 29 (Asad's visit); *International Herald Tribune*, 11 December 1972; *Daily Telegraph*, 7 December 1972 (Tlas's deal).
19. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 9, 10 March, 28 June 1973; *New York Times*, 5 May 1973.
20. For a similar argument, see Golan, *Yom Kippur and After*, p. 56.
21. According to Sadat, he did not inform Asad of his plan to go to war until the spring of 1973. This version was confirmed by Asad some years later. See his interview with *al-Sabah* (Amman), 10 June 1976.
22. It has become commonplace among Western analysts to view July 1972 as the major turning-point in Soviet–Syrian relations. See, for example, G. Golan, 'Syria and the Soviet Union since the Yom Kippur War', *Orbis*, Winter 1978, p. 777; M. Ma'oz, *Syria Under Hafiz al-Asad*, p. 22. Such views, nevertheless, are too sweeping. While there is little doubt that the summer 1972 events enhanced Syria's significance in Soviet eyes,

- they did not inject a novel element into Soviet–Syrian relations but rather served to reinforce existing trends, which had started after Asad’s first visit to Moscow in February 1971. The extent of the Soviet tilt towards Syria at the time should not be overemphasized: the Egyptian setback damaged Soviet strategic interests less than initially assumed, since the USSR was allowed to maintain its naval facilities in Egypt.
23. On Asad’s role in the Sudan Crisis see, *Financial Times*, 11 August 1971; *Egyptian Gazette*, 14 August 1971; *Jerusalem Post*, 11, 13 August 1971; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 1 October 1972.
 24. For Syrian accounts of Asad’s visit see *MENA* (Damascus), 2, 6, 7, 12 October 1972. For a Soviet account see *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 1 October 1972.
 25. *Al-Thawra*, 12 August 1972.
 26. *Al-Anwar* (Beirut), 10 August 1972.

5 War and Disengagement

1. An early illustration of Moscow’s negative attitude towards another Middle Eastern conflagration is offered by the records of a meeting in May 1971 between the leaders of the Syrian communist party and a Soviet delegation headed by Mikhail Suslov and Boris Ponomarev. During that meeting the Soviets went to great lengths to convince their Arab counterparts of the grave risks attending ‘the military option’. See, *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, vol. 2 (1972/3) pp. 188–9.
2. For the Egyptian account of this incident see: Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, pp. 207–9, 212–14; Sadat’s interviews with the *Observer* (19 March 1978) and with the Lebanese newspapers *al-Nahar* (1 March 1974) and *al-Anwar* (28 March 1974), and his speeches on 18 April 1974, 15 and 28 September 1975. Vinogradov’s version was published in the Beirut newspaper *al-Safir* on 17 April 1974.
3. Sadat’s version was confirmed several years later by Abd al-Khalim Khaddam. See, *Tishrin*, 17 May 1980.
4. *TASS*, 7 October 1973; *New York Times*, 9 October 1973.
5. On Kosygin’s visit see: *TASS* and *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian* of 19 October; *New York Times*, 20 October.
6. The Resolution called upon the belligerents to terminate military hostilities within twelve hours, to start negotiations immediately ‘under appropriate auspices’ for the implementation of Resolution 242, and for the establishment of ‘a just and durable peace in the Middle East’. For the text of the resolution see the *New York Times*, 20 October 1973.

Interestingly, the linkage between resolutions 242 and 338 was not initiated by the Soviets. The USSR wanted Resolution 338 to include a demand for a complete Israeli withdrawal, and acquiesced in the American position only as a result of its conviction in the urgency of a ceasefire. See, G. Golan, ‘Soviet Decisionmaking in the Yom Kippur War’, in J. Valenta and W. C. Potter (eds), *Soviet Decisionmaking for National Security*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984) p. 208.

7. See Asad's speech explaining his decision to accept Resolution 338, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 29 October 1973.
8. Ibid.; Asad's interview with the West German journal *General Anzeiger*, brought by *L'Action* (Tunis), 8 May 1974.
9. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 29 October 1973.
10. It should be noted, however, that *Trud* took care to emphasize that Syria's participation in Geneva depended on the conference's substance. For similar optimistic reports see, for example, D. Volsky, 'Blizhnii Vostok: Otvestvenni Etap', *Novoye Vremya*, no. 45, 9 November 1973, p. 6; TASS, 30 October, 12 November 1973.
11. *L'Orient Le-Jour*, 30 January 1974.
12. AFP, 11 November 1973.
13. Ibid., 11 December 1973; Khaddam's interview with *Asahi Shimbun* (Tokyo), 11 December 1973.
14. See Brezhnev's speeches to the World Peace Conference (26 October 1973) and the Indian Parliament (29 November). For the statements of the other Soviet leaders see, *Pravda*, 16 November 1973; *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 6 November 1973, and in *Arabic*, 26 November.
15. See, for example, G. Mirsky, 'The Middle East – New Factors', *New Times*, no. 48, 1973, pp. 18–19; Ye. Primakov, "'Sbalansirovanny Kurs" na Blizhnem Vostoke ili staraya politika inymi sredstvami?', *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodniye Otnasheniia*, no. 12 (1976) pp. 46–50.
16. *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 15, 17 December 1973.
17. Seale, *Asad*, p. 233.
18. TASS, 18 December 1973. It should be noted, however, that Syria's decision not to come to Geneva did not escape a measure of Soviet criticism, albeit mild and indirect. See, for example, *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 20 December 1973.
19. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 23 December 1973.
20. *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 24 December 1973.
21. TASS, 23 December 1973; *Radio Moscow in English*, 24 December 1973.
22. TASS, 23 December 1973.
23. *Le Monde*, 27 December 1973; *Jerusalem Post*, 3, 14 February 1974.
24. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 351.
25. *New York Times*, 23 January 1974.
26. *Pravda*, 25 January 1974. See also, TASS, 23 January 1974; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 23 January 1974.
27. TASS, 30 January 1974.
28. See, for example, *Guardian*, 23 January 1974. For further discussion of this issue see below, pp. 19–20.
29. *L'Orient Le-Jour*, 21 January 1974.
30. See, for example, Khaddam's interview with *al-Riyad*, 3 February 1974.
31. *Al-Bayraq* (Beirut), 21 February 1974.
32. The two countries, though, remained deeply split on the essence of such a settlement. See below Chapter 1.
33. DPA (Hamburg), 6 March 1974; *Daily Telegraph*, 6 March 1974.

34. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 7 March 1974; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 7 March 1974 (emphasis added).
35. See, for example, *The Times*, 28 March 1974.
36. *MENA* (Damascus), 9 March 1974.
37. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 7 March 1974.
38. *International Herald Tribune*, 9 August 1974; *Daily Telegraph* 8 July, 5 September 1974; *Guardian*, 29 April, 18 December 1974.
39. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 8 March 1974.
40. TASS, 11 April 1974.
41. See, for example, *Pravda*, 13, 14, 18 April 1974; *Izvestiya*, 18 April 1974.
42. *Ibid.*, 13 April 1974.
43. *Pravda*, 30 April 1974; TASS, 29 May 1974; Golan, *Yom Kippur and After*, p. 205.
44. For the text of the communiqué, see *Pravda*, 30 May 1974; *SANA* (Damascus), 29 May 1974.
45. See, for example, *New York Times*, 21 May 1974; *Moscow Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 21 May 1974.
46. See, for example, *Pravda*, 3, 4, 5 May 1974; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 4, 5 May 1974; TASS, 3 May 1974.
47. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 30 May 1974.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Asad's interview with *al-Ahram* (Cairo), 5 July 1974.
50. See, for example, Khaddam's press conference, *MENA*, 4 June 1974; Deputy Premier, Muhammad Khaidar's interview with *al-Musawar* (Cairo), 26 July 1974.
51. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 16 June 1974; Ma'oz, *Syria Under Hafiz al-Asad*, p. 25.
52. Seale, *Asad*, p. 249.
53. R. O. Freedman, *Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East Since 1970*, revised edition (New York: Praeger, 1978), p. 163; Asad's 5 July 1974 interview with *al-Ahram*; Khaidar's 26 July interview with *al-Musawar*.
54. *Sunday Times*, 5 May 1974; *Financial Times*, 30 August 1974.
55. *Jerusalem Post*, 11 June 1974; *Daily Telegraph*, 8 July 1974; *International Herald Tribune*, 9 August 1974.
56. D. Volsky, 'Step towards Settlement', *New Times*, no. 23 (June 1974), p. 9; 'Arab East: Miracles and Realities', *Ibid.*, p. 12.
57. Y. Potomov, 'Middle East Settlement: Urgent Task', *New Times*, no. 31 (August 1974) p. 22.
58. For this line of argument see, for example, V. Alexandrov, 'Middle East: A New Step Toward Peace', *International Affairs*, no. 8 (August 1974) pp. 86–8.
59. *Izvestiya*, 25 July 1974.
60. G. Golan and I. Rabinovich, 'The Soviet Union and Syria' in Y. Rö, *The Limits to Power* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 221.
61. Asad's meeting with Brezhnev took place during his stopover in Moscow en route to North Korea. For a description of the discussions, see: TASS, 27 September 1974; *Pravda*, 28 September 1974; *New Times*, no. 40 (1974), p. 5; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 28 September, 3 October 1974.
62. See, for example, Syrian information minister, Ahmad Iskandar Ah-

- mad's interviews with the *Bulgarian News Agency (BTA)*, 11 October 1974, and the Lebanese newspaper, *al-Safir*, 12 October 1974.
63. TASS, 3 February 1975.
 64. In late 1974, however, in response to Egypt's more forthcoming approach towards the idea of reconvening Geneva, the Soviets agreed to conclude a limited arms deal, primarily covering aviation-related equipment and including modern aircraft (e.g. MiG-23, SU-20) the Egyptians had not utilized previously. See Karsh, *Soviet Arms Transfers*, p. 10.
 65. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 11 October 1974.
 66. I. Belayev, 'Who is Inflaming the Hotbed of Tension?', *Za Rubezhom*, 28 February–6 March 1975, pp. 10–11.
 67. L. Tolkunov, 'Blizhnii Vostok: Istoki Krizisa i Puti Ego Uregulirovaniia', *Kommunist*, no. 13 (September 1974) p. 105.
 68. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 14 October 1974.
 69. DPA (Cairo), 14, 15 October 1974. For further details on Kissinger's talks in Damascus see, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 11, 14 October, 7 November 1974; *MENA* (Cairo), 7 November 1974; *New York Times*, 19 November 1974.
 70. *New York Times*, 15, 16 November 1974.
 71. *Izvestiya*, 8, 19 November 1974; *Radio Moscow in English*, 18 November 1974; TASS, 12, 14, 20 November 1974; *al-Ba'th*, 7 November 1974.
 72. See, for example, Golan and Rabinovich, *The Soviet Union and Syria*, p. 221.
 73. TASS, 20, 21, 25 November 1974; *Radio Moscow in English*, 19 November 1974; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 20, 22 November 1974.
 74. *Egyptian Gazette*, 22 November 1974.
 75. In late 1974 the Soviets announced that Brezhnev would not visit the Middle East as planned, thus setting in motion a vast wave of speculations regarding the reasons for the cancellation of the tour. These ranged from rumours on a serious deterioration in Brezhnev's health to reports on severe difficulties in Soviet–Egyptian relations.
 76. See, for example, *al-Thawra*, 1, 20 February 1975; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 22 March 1975; *al-Ba'th*, 26 March 1975; *Moscow Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 11 February, 5, 10 March 1975; D. Antonov, 'Urgent Task', *New Times*, no. 7 (February 1975), p. 6; TASS, 26 February, 5, 13 March 1975; *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 7 March 1975.
 77. *Jerusalem Post*, 15 December 1974; *SANA* (Damascus), 4 March 1975.
 78. *Amman Domestic Service*, 15 March 1975.
 79. *New York Times*, 27 March 1975.
 80. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 24 March 1975; *Izvestiya*, 25 March 1975.
 81. See, for example, *Pravda*, 25 March 1975; TASS, 28 March 1975; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 24, 31 March, 10, 15 April 1975; *al-Ba'th*, 26, 30 March 1975; *al-Thawra*, 18 April 1975; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 29 March, 11 May 1975.
 82. *New York Times*, 27 March 1975.
 83. In March 1975 the Soviets began referring to the need for preparatory work prior to the reactivation of Geneva. These references, nevertheless, did not reflect an interest in postponing the conference but rather an anxiety to prepare the background for its convening, at the earliest

- possible moment, so as to ensure the conference's success. See, for example, *Pravda*, 30 March 1975; *Izvestiya*, 1 April; *Moscow Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 31 March 1975.
84. *Pravda*, 17, 23, 27 April 1975.
 85. *Pravda*, 27 April 1975; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 22, 25 April 1975.
 86. TASS, 23 April 1975.
 87. See, for example, J. Schreiber, 'The Growth of Peace Sentiment in Israel', *New Times*, no. 26 (1975) pp. 10–11.
 88. *Jerusalem Post*, 25 April 1975; *Christian Science Monitor*, 25 April 1975.
 89. *New York Times*, 5 May 1975.
 90. In his 20 July 1976 speech on the Lebanese crisis, Asad argued that the United States had offered Syria a unilateral 'cosmetic' Israeli withdrawal on the Golan, but failed to mention when this proposal had been made. On the other hand, Ambassador Richard Murphy, the then US ambassador to Syria, does not recall an American suggestion for a unilateral withdrawal on the Golan at the time. (Interview with Richard Murphy, London, 5 April 1989.)
 91. See, for example, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 11 May, 1 June 1975; *al-Thawra*, 22 June, 12 July; *Izvestiya*, 29 May; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 20, 27 June 1975.
 92. E. R. F. Sheehan, *The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976) p. 196; 'Ba'th Party Statement on the Disengagement Agreement', *Damascus Domestic Service*, 3 September 1975.
 93. See, for example, Asad's interviews with *Time* (1 December 1975) and *Newsweek* (14 September 1975). See also, *Financial Times*, 13 October 1975.
 94. See, for example Asad's speech on the anniversary of the October War, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 6 October 1975; Sheehan, *The Arabs*, p. 196; *The Times*, 2 October 1975; TASS, 9 November 1975.
 95. Asad's interview with *al-Rai al-Amm* (Kuwait), 18 October 1975; *New York Times*, 26 October 1975; *Sunday Telegraph*, 12 October 1975.
 96. *Daily Telegraph*, 18 November 1975.
 97. TASS, 10 November 1975. Another indication of the Soviet anxiety to reconvene Geneva was afforded by the arrival of Vladimir Vinogradov for talks in Syria and Jordan in December 1975.

6 Lebanon

1. The decisions of the 'First All-Syrian Congress', published in Damascus on 2 July 1919, defined 'Greater Syria' as the area bounded by the Taurus Mountains to the north, Aqaba and Rafah to the south, the Mediterranean to the West and the Euphrates and Khabur rivers to the east. These boundaries include today's Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. The roots of the concept 'Greater Syria' can be traced back to the days of the Ummayyad Caliphate, when the vast land north of *hijaz* ('*Bilad al-Sha'm*', the Northern Country) constituted a separate political entity.

2. Asad's 20 July speech on the Lebanese crisis; Asad's interviews with *al-Hawadith* (Beirut), 26 June 1975; *Events* (London), 1 October 1976.
3. Asad's 20 July speech.
4. Ibid.
5. M. Tlas, *al-Gazw al-Israili Li Lubnan* (Damascus: Tishrin, 1983) p. 199. Indeed, in a visit to Lebanon in January 1975, Asad reportedly discussed with President Suleiman Faranjieh the possibility of Syrian-Lebanese military coordination, as a means to forestall outflanking Israeli operation through Lebanese territory.
6. *Al-Rai al-Amm* (Kuwait), 7 January 1976.
7. SANA, 25 September 1975; *al-Hawadith*, 12 December 1975; *al-Safir* (Beirut), 21 May 1976. These forces were deployed near the northern town of Tripoli in an attempt to end the fighting there.
8. *New York Times*, 10, 12 April 1976; *Washington Post*, 10 April 1976.
9. *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 10, 11 October 1975.
10. *Pravda*, 12 October 1975; *Izvestiya*, 21 October 1975; *Radio Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 22 October 1975.
11. *Radio Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 25 September 1975.
12. See, for example, the warnings by Premier Rabin and Defence Minister, Peres: *Ma'ariv* (Tel Aviv), 8, 21, 25 January 1976; *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), 12 January 1976.
13. This fact was revealed by Asad in his speech on 20 July.
14. See, for example, *Pravda*, 2 November, 26 December 1975, 20, 23, 25 January 1976; *Izvestiya*, 27 December 1975, 21, 22 January, 19 February 1976; TASS, 19, 23, 24 January 1976.
15. See, for example, statements by Defence Minister Peres in *Ma'ariv*, 22, 26 March 1976. Another factor that reinforced Israeli tolerance towards Syria's growing military intervention in Lebanon was the assumption that this intervention would reduce the Syrian ability and willingness to launch war, or, alternatively, to obstruct a move towards a political settlement.
16. *Pravda*, 18 March 1976; TASS, 21 March 1976.
17. TASS, 16 April 1976. For further expressions of support for the Syrian activities see: *Pravda*, 16, 21, 22, 28 April 1976; *Izvestiya*, 17, 23 April 1976; V. Nikolayev, 'Trying Days for Lebanon', *New Times*, no. 16 (April 1976) pp. 10–11; A. Klimov, 'Ancient Syria Today', *New Times*, no. 16 (April 1976), pp. 24–5.
18. *Pravda*, 18, 29 May 1976.
19. *Radio Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 28 May 1976.
20. For such views see: Seale, *Asad*, p. 286; Golan and Rabinovich, *The Soviet Union and Syria*, p. 226; R. Freedman, *Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East*, pp. 242–4; P. Ramet, *The Soviet-Syrian Relationship*, p. 38; N. J. Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: The 1975–76 Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 309–10.
21. A similar argument is presented in I. Kass's *The Lebanese Civil War 1975–1976: A Case of Crisis Mismanagement* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1979) pp. 18, 37–9. There is, nevertheless, no evidence whatsoever for her assumption regarding Soviet-Syrian complicity, let alone collusion, in the intervention in Lebanon.

22. A. Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1980) p. 134.
23. *Al-Nahar Arab Report*, 7, no. 21 (24 May 1976).
24. For the text of the communiqué see, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 4 June 1976.
25. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1976.
26. K. Dawisha, *Soviet Foreign Policy towards Egypt*, p. 78. See also *Guardian*, 3 May 1976; *al-Akhbar* (Jordan), 15 May 1977.
27. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 2 June 1976.
28. TASS, 5, 7 June 1976; *Pravda*, 6–8 June 1976; *Izvestiya*, 7 June 1976.
29. *International Herald Tribune*, 5 May 1976.
30. A. Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis*, p. 149.
31. Kass, *The Lebanese Civil War*, p. 42.

7 Towards a Bilateral Treaty

1. Asad's interview with Patrick Seale, *Observer*, 6 March 1977.
2. Asad's interview with *Time* magazine, as broadcast by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 17 January 1977.
3. *Izvestiya*, 1, 8 January 1977.
4. Asad's interview with Patrick Seale, 6 March 1977.
5. See, for example, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 15, 20, 23 January 1977; *al-Ba'th*, 15 March 1977.
6. *Financial Times*, 20 April 1977.
7. TASS, SANA, 18 April 1977.
8. The USSR was especially sensitive to the issue, given the intensification of Soviet relations with the Marxist regime in Ethiopia at the time.
9. TASS, 18 April 1977.
10. See, for example, *Izvestiya*, 22, 23 April 1977; TASS, 18, 19, 21, 22 April 1977; *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 18, 19 April 1977; *al-Thawra*, 16, 20, 24 April 1977; *Tishrin*, 20 April; *al-Ba'th*, 24 April.
11. TASS, 22 April 1977 (emphasis added).
12. TASS, 22 April 1977; SANA, 28 June 1977; P. Cockburn, 'Political obstacles hinder plans for increased trade', *MEED*, 16 September 1977, p. 11.
13. TASS, 22 April 1977.
14. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 9 May 1977.
15. Y. Tyunkov, 'USSR-Syria: Strengthening Co-operation', *New Times*, no. 18 (April 1977) p. 7.
16. *Pravda*, 15 June 1977.
17. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 4, 12 August 1977.
18. *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 5 August 1977; TASS, 5 August 1977; For further positive references to Damascus's stance, see: TASS, 4, 9, 11 August 1977; *Izvestiya*, 6 August.
19. Interview with *al-Rai al-Amm* (Kuwait), 14 February 1978. As shown in Chapter 5, this conviction can be traced back to the signing of the second disengagement agreement. But as long as Asad remained hopeful of reincorporating Egypt into the overall Arab effort, he did not operation-

alize the idea of 'strategic parity'. It was Sadat's Jerusalem visit, then, which has brought this concept to the fore of Syria's national strategy.

For further references to the need to achieve strategic parity with Israel see, Abd al-Khalim Khaddam's declarations, as brought by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 17 September 1977, 13, 24, 27 January 1978; Khaddam's interview with *al-Rai al-Amm* and *Events*, 8, 10 February 1978 respectively.

20. Seale, *Asad*, p. 311.
21. See, for example, *Pravda*, 17, 19 November 1977; *TASS*, 17–20 November 1977; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 17, 28 November 1977.
22. See, for example, *Pravda*, 4, 5 February 1978; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2 December 1977; *TASS*, 5 December 1977, 10 February 1978; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 2 December 1977, 6, 7 February 1978. The Front consisted of Syria, Libya, Algeria, South Yemen and the PLO.
23. For the text of the communiqué see *Izvestiya* and *Damascus Domestic Service*, 23 February 1978. The fact that the Soviet support for the Palestinians' 'right of return' did not imply acceptance of the Arab interpretation of this concept (i.e. the liquidation of the State of Israel), but was rather aimed at demonstrating the extent of Moscow's backing for the rejectionist camp, is evidenced from Brezhnev's speech honouring Asad, in which he reiterated the well-known formula of Israel's right to exist within secure borders. *TASS*, 21 February 1978.
24. *Financial Times*, 25 February 1978; *Guardian*, 25 February 1978; *Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 1978.
25. The February 1978 deal was of a relatively limited scope and contained primarily aviation and air defence items.
26. Cited by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 25 February 1978 (emphasis added). For further references to Moscow's agreement to support Syria's pursuit of a strategic parity see, *SANA*, 26 February 1978; *Tishrin*, 24 February 1978; *al-Siyasa* (Kuwait), 23 February 1978.
27. *SANA*, 23 September 1978.
28. *Qatari News Agency (QNA)* (Doha), 27 September 1978.
29. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 5 October 1987 (emphasis added).
30. *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 5 October 1978.
31. *Al-Ba'th*, 7 October 1978; *al-Mustaqbal* (Paris), 16 December 1978.
32. *Radio Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 27 September 1978.
33. P. Ramet, *The Soviet-Syrian Relationship*, p. 39; R. Freedman, 'Soviet policy toward Syria since Camp David', *Middle East Review*, Fall/Winter 1981–1982, p. 34.
34. *Al-Mustaqbal*, 16 December 1978.
35. Freedman, *Soviet Policy toward Syria*, p. 39.
36. See, for example, *TASS*, 27 October 1978; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 27 October 1978.
37. *Observer*, 17 December 1978.
38. *Le Monde*, 28 November 1978.
39. *Guardian*, 9 December 1978.
40. The deal was signed during a visit to Moscow by the Syrian minister of defence, Mustafa Tlas.
41. For typical Syrian attacks on the United States see: *Damascus Domestic*

- Service*, 26 February, 30 June, 8, 9 July, 5 August 1979.
42. *TASS*, 26 March 1979.
 43. See, for example, *Pravda*, 28 March, 12 April 1979; *Trud*, 30 March 1979; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 17 April, 22 May 1979; *TASS*, 19 April 1979.
 44. *Financial Times*, 15 October 1979.
 45. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 15 October 1979.
 46. *Ibid.*, 18 October 1979.
 47. *Al-Mustaqbal* (Paris), 3 November 1979.
 48. For further discussion of this issue see below, p. 32.
 49. At the UN discussion, South Yemen voted against the resolution (i.e. in favour of the USSR), Syria and Algeria abstained and Libya was absent from the deliberations.
 50. *Associated Press*, 29 January 1980.
 51. *TASS*, 29 January 1980.
 52. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 18 February 1980.
 53. *Ibid.*, 15 March 1980.
 54. *Ibid.*, 23 April 1980.
 55. *Tishrin*, 17 May 1980.
 56. *Al-Rai al-Amm* (Kuwait), 17 May 1980.
 57. See, for example, Khaddam's interviews with *KUNA* (as brought by *Tishrin* on 17 May 1980) and with *al-Nahar al-Arabi wa al-duwali* (Paris), 28 July–3 August 1980; Iskandar's interviews with *QNA* (Doha) on 25 August 1980, and *al-Anwar* (Beirut), 24 September 1980. See also, *Tishrin*, 25, 27 June, 13 July, 1 August 1980.
 58. *SANA*, 17 May 1980 (Khaddam's interview); *Damascus Domestic Service*, 25 August 1980 (Ba'th Congress).

8 From Crisis to War

1. Ahmad's interview with *Monday Morning* (Beirut), as brought by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 9 November 1980.
2. See, for example, *Pravda*, 3 December 1980; *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 12 October 1980.
3. *TASS*, 8 October 1980 (emphasis added).
4. See, for example, *TASS*, 25 November 1980; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 16 December 1980.
5. See, for example, *TASS*, 6 December 1980.
6. See: *TASS*, 2 December 1980; *Pravda*, 3 December 1980; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 2 December 1980.
7. See interview of the Israeli chief of staff, Refael Eitan, on *Israeli Television*, 14 May 1981.
8. *TASS*, 5 May 1981; *Pravda*, *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 17 May 1981.
9. Kornienko's welcome address, as brought by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 6 May 1981. See also *Radio Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 11, 20 May 1981.
10. *Voice of Lebanon*, 19 May 1981. Egyptian vice-president, Husni Muba-

- rak's interview with *Ma'ariv* (Tel Aviv), 25 May 1981. Asad's visit to the USSR was later denied by Abd al-Khalim Khaddam – *SANA*, 1 June 1981.
11. *IDF Radio* (Tel Aviv), 13 May 1981; *Washington Post*, 16 May 1981; *Daily Telegraph*, 3, 4 July 1981.
 12. *TASS*, 14 May 1981; *Financial Times*, 3 June 1981.
 13. *Daily Telegraph*, 4, 7 July 1981; *Financial Times*, 6, 7 July 1981.
 14. *Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic*, 8 May 1981.
 15. See, for example, Soviet ambassador to Lebanon, Alexander Soldatov, as cited by *Beirut Domestic Service*, 14 May 1981; see also *Moscow Television*, 16 May 1981.
 16. *Pravda*, 23 May 1981.
 17. See, for example, *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 14, 17 May 1981.
 18. *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 6 May 1981.
 19. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 18 May 1981.
 20. Soldatov, as cited by *Beirut Domestic Service*, 16 May 1981.
 21. *TASS*, 28 May 1981.
 22. *Ibid.*, 26 May 1981.
 23. See, for example, Asad's interview with *Budapest Television*, 28 June 1981, with *al-Rai al-Amm* (Kuwait), 13 December 1981.
 24. Khaddam's interview with *al-Nahar al-Arabi Wa al-Duwali*, as brought by *SANA*, 6 June 1981.
 25. Asad's interview with *ABC*, *NBC* and *CBS* television networks, as well as with *Stern* magazine, as brought by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 21 May and 8 June respectively.
 26. *Al-Majalah* (London), 11–17 July 1981, pp. 42–3.
 27. Asad's interview with *al-Rai al-Amm* (Kuwait), 13 December 1981.
 28. *Tishrin*, 1 October 1981.
 29. *Al-Watan* (Kuwait), 29 November 1981. Indirect evidence of the Soviet refusal to increase military support for Syria can also be found in Asad's interview with *al-Rai al-Amm* on 13 December.
 30. *Radio Peace and Progress in Hebrew*, 25 September 1981; *Radio Moscow in English*, 6 October 1981.
 31. See, for example, *Pravda*, 16 December 1981, 6, 10 January 1982; *TASS*, 18, 19 December 1981.
 32. See, for example, Syrian deputy foreign minister, Nasir Qadour's interview with *Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic*, 18 December 1981.
 33. The fact that Syria requested a defence pact during Khaddam's visit is substantiated by Khaddam's interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (Kuwait), 6 January 1982. See also Ahmad's interview with *Monday Morning and Guardian*, 15 January 1982.
 34. Syrian government statement, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 16 December 1981.
 35. Ahmad's press interview as reported by *Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic*, 17 December 1981.
 36. I. Rabinovich, 'The Changing Prism: Syrian Policy in Lebanon as a Mirror, an Issue and an Instrument', in M. Ma'oz and A. Yaniv (eds), *Syria Under Hafiz al-Asad*, pp. 185–6.

37. Z. Schiff and E. Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984) pp. 42–4.
38. TASS, 22 April 1982.
39. *Soviet Television*, 8 June 1982. Bovin's analysis of the Israeli war aims is essentially identical to the explanation offered by Israeli observers of the war. According to Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, who have produced the best account of the Lebanon War to date, Ariel Sharon's grand design was

A simplistic approach built on highly specious logic. The scheme posited that from the moment Israel struck a blow in Lebanon, a chain reaction would be set in motion and continue until it had forged a new balance of forces by (1) eliminating the PLO as an independent political factor (even if it retained nuisance value as a source of terrorism); (2) cutting Syria down to size and neutralizing the threat it posed to Israel; (3) installing an allied regime in rehabilitated Lebanon under the rule of Bashir Gumayel; (4) heightening cooperation with the United States while further supplanting Soviet influence in the Middle East. In a single stroke, Sharon believed he would reap a historic yield and open glorious vistas before his country. A victory in Lebanon, so the theory went, would accord Israel absolute control over the West Bank by inaugurating an era of unchallenged Israeli domination and, at the same time, generate momentum for further initiatives to impose Israel's will on its neighbours.

- Schiff and Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 304.
40. G. Golan, 'The Soviet Union and the Israeli Action in Lebanon', *International Affairs*, vol. 59, no. 1 (Winter 1982/83) p. 7.
41. R. O. Freedman, 'The Soviet Union and the Middle East: Failure to Match the United States as a Superpower', *Middle East Contemporary Survey* (Hereinafter *MECS*), vol. 6 (1981–2) p. 43.
42. For a similar view of Moscow's behaviour during the Lebanon War see, D. R. Spechler, 'The Politics of Intervention: The Soviet Union and the Crisis in Lebanon', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, vol. XX, no. 2 (Summer 1987) pp. 115–43. Nevertheless, Spechler clearly overstates her case both by characterizing Soviet behaviour as 'extremely active', and by arguing that the USSR 'succeeded either in inducing all of the important participants to act according to Soviet wishes or in frustrating their plans and aspirations when they refused to do so' (p. 116).
43. See, for example, *Radio Peace and Progress*, 8 June 1982.
44. *International Herald Tribune*, 11 June 1982; *New York Times*, 30 June 1982.
45. *New York Times*, 11 June 1982.
46. TASS, 7 June 1982.
47. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1982 (emphasis added).
48. There has always been the possibility of influencing the course of a specific war through direct military intervention, as the USSR did in the Egyptian–Israeli War of Attrition in 1970. None the less, this extraordinary intervention was undertaken half-heartedly and in the face of

- an Egyptian ultimatum, thereby reflecting the extreme limits, rather than the norm, of Soviet military intervention. For a detailed discussion of the nature and characteristics of Soviet military engagement in Middle Eastern wars, as well as their limitations, see E. Karsh, *The Cautious Bear: Soviet Military Engagement in Middle East Wars in the Post-1967 Era* (Boulder, CO.: Westview, 1985) and 'The Myth of Direct Soviet Intervention in an Arab-Israeli War', *RUSI Journal*, vol. 129, no. 3 (September 1984) pp. 28–32.
49. Schiff and Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 57.
 50. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 19 June 1982.
 51. *Ibid.*, 21 June 1982. For further praise of the Soviet friendship and support see, for example, Ahmad Iskandar Ahmad's news conference (Damascus television), *Damascus Domestic Service*, 20, 27 June 1982; *al-Thawra*, 4 August 1982.
 52. For Syria's pronounced interest in a defence pact see, for example, Iskandar's above-mentioned news conference, as well as his interview with *Pravda*, 20 June 1982.
 53. On 1 September 1982, President Reagan made an important speech calling for a new initiative on the settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Modelled, by and large, on US Middle Eastern policy, Reagan's peace plan envisaged an Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 border, with some revisions, in exchange for a peace settlement. Rejecting the idea of an independent Palestinian state, Reagan suggested 'self-government by the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan'.
 54. Seale, *Asad*, p. 383; private communication.
 55. *Pravda*, 21 July 1982 (Brezhnev's initiative); *TASS*, 28 August 1982 (Syrian support for the initiative).

9 The Post-Brezhnev Interregnum

1. Seale, *Asad*, pp. 398–9.
2. *Moscow Television*, 1 February 1983 (emphasis added). For further expressions of Soviet support for Syria's right to install surface-to-air missiles on its territory see, *Izvestiya*, 19 January 1983; *Pravda*, 1, 3 February 1983; *TASS*, 31 January, 3, 4, 26 February, 1 March 1983.
3. For the view that the Soviet commitment to Syria's security, in accordance with the 1980 treaty, did not apply to Lebanon, see Alexander Soldatov's comments as brought by *Beirut Domestic Service*, 2 March 1983.
4. *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 14 February 1983; *Radio Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 2 March 1983.
5. For the impact of the Soviet assurances on Syrian morale, see, for example, *Tishrin*, 31 January, 28 February, 28 March 1983.
6. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 17 November 1982.
7. Schiff and Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 295.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *TASS*, 23 November 1982.
10. For further Soviet appeals to the PLO implying indirect criticism, see,

- for example, the telegram sent to Arafat by the Soviet leadership on 28 November 1982, on the occasion of the international solidarity day with the Palestinian people: *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 28 November 1982.
11. Schiff and Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 297.
 12. *Tishrin*, 13 May 1983; *SANA*, 5 May, 9 June 1983.
 13. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 19 May 1983.
 14. *International Herald Tribune*, 24–25 September 1983; *Guardian*, 14 May, 9 June 1983; *The Times*, 9, 10 June 1983.
 15. Moreover, on 4 December 1983 the United States suffered a public humiliation, when two of its aircraft were shot down by the Syrians, with one pilot killed and the other captured. The captured pilot was released in January 1984 following a highly publicized visit of the Democratic presidential candidate, Jesse Jackson, to Damascus.
 16. See, for example, *Radio Moscow in English*, 14 May 1983; *TASS*, 9 June 1983.
 17. *TASS Statement on Lebanon*, 9 May 1983; *Moscow Television*, 11 May 1983; *Radio Moscow in English*, 14 May 1983.
 18. *Pravda*, 12 May 1983.
 19. *Radio Moscow in English*, 11 May 1983; M. Zgersky, 'Syria A Target', *New Times*, no. 48 (November 1983) p. 15.
 20. *Washington Post*, 7, 9 October 1983; *Foreign Report*, 30 June 1983.
 21. For Soviet pressure on the PLO see, for example, *TASS*, 13 July 1983; *The Times*, 27 June 1983; *Washington Post*, 17 July 1983; *MECS*, 1982/3, p. 314.
 22. *TASS*, 11 November 1983.
 23. *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 November 1983.
 24. *Pravda*, 19 November 1983.
 25. As noted earlier, the only crisis when the Soviet–Syrian treaty was given salience by Moscow was the 'Golan Crisis' following the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights in December 1981. Yet as the escalatory potential of this crisis was very small, the reference to the treaty did not imply any Soviet military commitment to Syria's security; rather, it served as a signal to Syria of the benefits of the treaty, so as to forestall the conclusion of a defence pact.
 26. A. Stepanov, 'USSR–Syria: Consistent Support', *New Times*, No. 42 (October 1983) p. 13.
 27. *Novosti* as cited by the *New York Times*, 27 November 1983.
 28. *Pravda*, 13 November 1983.
 29. Seale, *Asad*, p. 358. See also R. O. Freedman, 'Moscow, Damascus, and the Lebanese Crisis of 1982–1984', *Middle East Review*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Fall 1984) p. 35.
 30. *Al-Yamama* (Saudi Arabia), 30 March 1983.
 31. *MEED*, 15 April 1983.
 32. The TU-154 purchase cost Syria \$51 million: *al-Thawra*, 5 March 1983; *Guardian*, 14 May 1983.
 33. For the text of the Soviet peace plan see Appendix 2.
 34. Seale, *Asad*, p. 431.
 35. Aliyev's visit was accompanied by contradictory reports on sharp Soviet–

- Syrian differences over the Iran–Iraq war, on the one hand, and the conclusion of a large arms deal, on the other. See, for example, *Yediot Acharonot* (Tel Aviv), 20 March 1984; *al-Qabas* (Kuwait), 19 March 1984.
36. *Pravda*, 14 March 1984.
 37. See, for example, *TASS*, 16, 17 April 1984; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 17, 21, 28 April 1984.
 38. For Syrian support for the Soviet peace plan see, for example, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 30 July, 22 August 1984.
 39. See, for example, *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 28 April 1984.
 40. In March 1984, Hafiz Asad nominated three vice-presidents: Abd al-Khalim Khaddam, the former foreign minister; Rif'at Asad, the president's brother, and Zuhair Mashariqa, a Ba'th official of a lower standing. Directly related to Asad's health problems, this move confirmed the existence of power struggle within the Syrian leadership. For the decree announcing the changes see, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 11 March 1984.
 41. *TASS*, 29 May 1984; *SANA*, 29 May 1984. For further Soviet and Syrian accounts of the visit see, for example, *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 25 May, 2 June 1984; *TASS*, 28 May 1984; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 29 May 1984. For Western accounts see: *Guardian*, 30 May, 4 June 1984; *The Times*, 31 May, 1 June 1984.
 42. While Andropov was in power, Asad did not pay an official visit to the USSR, though he was reported to have gone on two secret visits. *International Herald Tribune*, 17 February 1984.
 43. *Al-Thawra*, *Tishrin*, *al-Ba'th*, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 15 October 1984.
 44. *Al-watan al-Arabi* (Beirut), 9 November 1984.
 45. *Ibid.*; *al-Watan* (Kuwait), 13 October 1984. Moscow's pressures on Syria with regard to the Iran–Iraq War reflected growing apprehensions about an Iraqi collapse, on the one hand, and a modest improvement in Soviet–Iranian relations which reduced Damascus's importance as a back-channel to Tehran, on the other.
 46. See the joint communiqué issued at the close of the visit, *Pravda*, 19 October 1984.
 47. *Foreign Report* (London), 22 November 1984, p. 8.
 48. *Radio Moscow in English*, 17 October 1984. While the Soviet–Syrian joint communiqué contained no reference to Syria's relations with other Arab countries, *Pravda's* report of the 18 October Politburo meeting reiterated this linkage.
 49. Indeed, in late 1984 the Soviets signed an arms deal with Jordan. L. C. Napper, 'The Arab Autumn of 1984: A Case Study of Soviet Middle East Diplomacy', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1985) p. 743.
 50. *New York Times*, 26 January 1986; *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 11, 25 May 1985. For further discussion of this issue see below, p. 50.
 51. *Pravda*, 19 October 1984.
 52. *Tishrin*, 17, 19 October 1984 (emphasis added). See also, *al-Ba'th*, 18, 19 October 1984; *al-Thawra*, 18 October 1984.

53. *Radio Monte Carlo*, 6 October 1984; *al-Hawadith* (London), 12 October 1984, pp. 27–9.
54. See, for example, Mustafa Tlas's interview with *Liberation* (Paris), 30 November 1984, p. 25; *Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1984.
55. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 28 November 1984.
56. Napper, *The Arab Autumn*, pp. 742–3.
57. It should be noted that Bovin also emphasized Syria's 'repeated indication' of the temporary basis of its military presence in Lebanon. Yet the overall context of the article left little doubt that this reference did not imply the need for a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, but rather was intended to praise Damascus for its lack of territorial ambitions towards this country.
58. *Radio Peace and Progress in Arabic*, 21 February 1985; see also *Pravda*, 1 January, 28 February 1985; TASS, 27 January 1985; O. Fomin, 'Palestinian Rights: Two Lines', *New Times*, no. 12 (March 1985) pp. 22–3; O. Fomin, 'Trying to Revive the Camp David Deal', *New Times*, No. 18 (April 1985) pp. 14–15.

10 Gorbachev and the Syrians

1. E. Karsh, 'Soviet-Israeli Relations: A New Phase?', *The World Today*, vol. 41, no. 12 (December 1985) pp. 214–17.
2. These included, *inter alia*, meetings between the Soviet and Israeli foreign ministers during discussions at the United Nations General Assembly in September 1986 and September 1987.
3. G. Golan, 'The Soviet Union and the PLO since the War in Lebanon', *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Spring 1986) p. 305.
4. A glimpse into the turbulence within the regime was afforded in January 1987 by the gaoling of General Muhammad al-Khouly, head of the Syrian air force intelligence and the most influential person in Damascus after Asad; he was believed to be behind the failed attempt to blow up an Israeli El-Al airplane in London in April 1986. See *Guardian*, 22 January 1987.
5. In December 1985, following the downing of two of its aircraft by the Israeli air force on 19 November in a dogfight over the Beq'a, Syria positioned some SA-2 surface-to-air missile batteries along its border with Lebanon and, moreover, deployed a few SA-6 and SA-8 mobile surface-to-air missile batteries on Lebanese territory. An open defiance of Israel's unwritten 'red lines', which excluded the introduction of Syrian surface-to-air missiles into Lebanon, this move created an immediate resurgence of tension between Israel and Syria. Although in early January 1986 Syria withdrew the mobile missiles from Lebanon, Israel remained uneasy about the presence of the SA-2 batteries on the Syrian-Lebanese border; they severely constrained the IAF flights over Lebanon. Yet, in order to avoid escalation, Israeli reconnaissance flights over Lebanon were moved westward.
6. *New York Times*, 24, 25 April 1986.
7. *Pravda*, 20 June 1985. That the Soviets pressurized Asad to mend the

fences with Arafat can also be inferred from the marked difference between the Soviet and Syrian accounts of the visit. While the Syrians went out of their way to emphasize the consensus between the two parties, arguing that 'regarding the situation in the Middle East and Lebanon, the Syrian and Soviet views were identical', the Soviet media bore no similar references. See, for example, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 19 June 1985; *TASS*, 19 June 1985; see also, *Le Monde*, 21 June 1985.

8. *MENA* (Cairo), 1 May 1985; *al-Qabas* (Kuwait), 21 June 1985.
9. *TASS*, 19 June 1985; *Pravda*, 20 June 1985.
10. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 27, 28 December 1985.
11. See, for example, *Pravda*, 29 December 1985.
12. *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 16 May 1986.
13. This warning was voiced a day before Khaddam's arrival, during Gorbachev's meeting with a group of British parliamentarians. *Financial Times*, 23 November 1986.
14. The conclusion of the arms deal is evidenced not only from Soviet, Syrian and Western accounts of the visit, but also from the arrival of several Soviet political and military officials in Damascus after the visit to discuss questions of military support. These included Konstantin Katushev, chairman of the USSR state committee for foreign economic relations (early June 1986), Army General Ye. F. Ivanovsky, commander of the Soviet ground forces and deputy minister of defence (November 1986), and Colonel General Pan'kin of the USSR air force (October 1986). For accounts of Khaddam's visit see, for example, *TASS*, 28 May 1986; *Moscow Television*, 28 May 1986; *Radio Moscow in Arabic*, 27 May 1986; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 28 May 1986; *Guardian*, 29 May 1986; *Financial Times*, 3 June 1986; *KUNA* (Kuwait), 27 May 1986; *Ha'aretz*, 30 May 1986.
15. *Izvestiya*, 30 May 1986.
16. *TASS*, 28 May, 1 June 1986.
17. *Al-Mustaqbal* (Paris), 14 June 1986, p. 10.
18. In February 1986 Iran made its first gain of Iraqi territory by occupying the peninsula of Fao on the south-eastern tip of Iraq; in early July Iran retook the town of Mehran on the central front, captured by Iraq a couple of months earlier, and in September Iranian forces made modest gains on the northern front.
19. See, for example, *Izvestiya*, 28 October 1985; Brutents's comments to *al-Ba'th*, 3 November 1985.
20. See, for example, Asad's interviews with *Liberation* (Paris), 14 February 1986, and with *Moscow Television*, 27 April 1986; Khaddam's support for Gorbachev's July 1986 proposal for an international conference, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 17 July 1986; Vice-President Mashariqa's interview with *al-Ba'th*, 16 November 1987; al-Shara's address at the UN General Assembly as brought by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 1 October 1986 and his interview with *L'Unita* (Milan), 16 December 1986; Umrán Adham's (Asad's aide) interview with *Liberation*, 3 November 1986. See also *al-Thawra*, 17 December 1986; *Damascus Domestic Service*, 2 April, 14 May, 12, 18 July 1986; 3 January, 16, 21 March, 2 April, 18 October 1987.

21. For Soviet accounts of Asad's talks with Gorbachev see: *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 24 April 1987; Joint Soviet-Syrian Statement on Asad's visit, *TASS*, 26 April 1987; Y. Potomov, 'USSR-Syria: Realistic Approach', *New Times*, no. 18 (May 1987) p. 8. On Moscow's agreement to reschedule Syria's debt see, *Financial Times*, 14 May 1987.
22. See, for example, *Guardian*, 24 July 1987; *Ma'ariv* (Tel Aviv), 22, 23 July 1987.
23. *TASS*, 26 April 1987.
24. V. Zhitomirsky, 'A Splendid View of Syria', *New Times*, No. 31 (August 1987) p. 5. See also, A. Porkovsky, 'Friendship Born in Space', *New Times*, No. 32 (August 1987), p. 5. For Syrian references to the joint space mission see, for example, *Damascus Domestic Service*, 22 July, 26 August 1987; *al-Ba'th*, 23 July 1987.
25. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 24 April 1987.
26. Potomov, *USSR-Syria*, p. 8.
27. *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 24 April 1987.
28. *TASS*, 26 April 1987; *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, 24 April 1987.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Asad's interview with the *Washington Post*, as brought by *Damascus Domestic Service*, 21 September 1987.
31. Vinogradov's interviews with *al-Anba* (Kuwait), 12, 29 June 1988.
32. *Jerusalem Post*, 9 January 1989; *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), 9 January 1989; F. Halliday, 'Mikhail and the Mullahs', *Marxism Today*, February 1989, p. 25.
33. Halliday, *Mikhail and the Mullahs*, p. 25; *Ha'aretz*, 4 January 1989; *Jerusalem Post*, 5, 7 December 1988; *Ma'ariv*, 5 December 1988; *TASS*, 12 June 1989.
34. See, for example *Pravda*, 2 February 1988; Gennady Gerasimov's interview with Israeli radio, *Jerusalem Domestic Service in Hebrew*, 20 January 1988.
35. See, for example, deputy foreign minister Vladimir Petrovsky's interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), 2 June 1988; *Pravda*, 29 July 1989; *Ha'aretz*, 30 September, 27 October, 16 December 1988.
36. Halliday, *Mikhail and the Mullahs*, p. 25; Z. Irwin, 'Israel and the Soviet Union: A Slow Thaw', *The World Today*, May 1989, p. 75. For Soviet references to these issues see, for example, an interview by Vladimir Polyakov, Head of the Near East Department in the Soviet Foreign Office, with *Le Quotidien De Paris*, 13 October 1988; Deputy Foreign Minister Petrovsky's speech at the UN General Assembly as broadcast by *TASS*, 14 December 1988, and his interview with *al-Hawadith* (London), 21 October 1988; interview by V. Naumkin of the Oriental Studies Institute, with *Sawt al-Sha'b* (Amman), 29 May 1988.
37. This suggestion was raised, *inter alia*, in a meeting between Edward Shevardnadze and Aryeh Levin, head of the Israeli consular delegation in Moscow, in December 1988 (*Ha'aretz*, 5 December 1988). See also, *Ma'ariv*, 6 December 1988.
38. V. Nosenko, 'Hope for the Middle East', *Jerusalem Post*, 23 June 1989 (emphasis added). The writer is a senior researcher at the Institute of

- World Economy and International Relations, USSR Academy of Sciences.
39. *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 31 May 1989 (emphasis added); Nosenko, *Hope for the Middle East*. For further Soviet references to the need to attain a regional 'balance of interests' see, for example, Shevardnadze's address in Cairo on 23 February 1989; *Radio Peace and Progress in Hebrew*, 31 May 1988; *Pravda*, 21 July 1988; *TASS*, 5 September 1988; Polyakov's interview with *Izvestiya*, 8 September 1989; Petrovsky's interview with *al-Qabas* (Kuwait), 14 October 1988; *Izvestiya*, 8 September 1989.
 40. *Radio Peace and Progress in Hebrew*, 31 May 1988.
 41. *Pravda*, 10 April 1988.
 42. For Soviet pressures on the PLO to recognize Israel see, V. Petrovsky's interview with *al-Qabas*, 14 October 1988; K. Brutents's interview with *al-Ittihad* (Abu Dhabi), 23 August 1988; *TASS*, 9, 14 September 1988; *Izvestiya*, 15 September 1988; *Pravda*, 12 October 1988; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 13 October 1988. See also, *Hadashot* (Tel Aviv), 29 August, 14 September, 14 October 1988; *Ma'ariv*, 18 September 1988; *Ha'aretz*, 8 October, 14 October 1988.
 43. This suggestion was made, *inter alia*, by Edward Shevardnadze during his meeting in New York in September 1989 with the Israeli foreign minister, Moshe Arnes. *TASS*, 28 September 1989. See also interview by a Soviet foreign ministry official, Oleg Sergeyev, with *Sawt al-Arab* (Amman), 27 May 1989.
 44. During the Gulf War Iraq disabused itself of its long-held rejectionism and began to voice, however limited, public support for peace negotiations between the Arabs and Israel. This process, however, has been (temporarily) reversed in 1990 due to Saddam Hussein's fears of an Israeli strike against Iraq's non-conventional arms industry, which drove him to threaten Israel with harsh retaliation.
 45. *Pravda*, 21 July 1988 (emphasis added).
 46. *Ma'ariv*, 16 October 1988; *Ha'aretz*, 24, 30 October 1988.
 47. *Ma'ariv*, 16, 17 January 1989.
 48. 'We certainly have to take into consideration that detente over regional issues makes it incumbent on both sides to offer concessions', argued Salah Khalaf, the second-in-command in the PLO, in an interview with the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Watan* on 27 June 1989.
 49. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 8 March 1989. For further Syrian criticism of the PLO's recognition of Israel, see *Damascus Domestic Service*, 19, 20 November, 30 December 1988.
 50. Asad managed to prevent Egypt's participation in the Arab summits in Amman (1987) and Algiers (1988). However, following the Amman summit all Arab states, with the exception of Syria, Libya and Lebanon restored diplomatic relations with Egypt. In May 1989 Egypt took part in the Arab summit in Casablanca, for the first time since its expulsion from the Arab League a decade earlier following the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. In October 1989 Mu'amar Qaddhafi paid an official visit to Egypt, and two months later the grudgy Asad re-established diplomatic relations with Egypt. In keeping with its 'new thinking' Moscow supported the Egyptian return to the Arab world. See,

- for example, *Pravda*, 25 April 1989; TASS, 6 May 1989.
51. On Tlas's visit see: TASS, 29 October, 1 November 1988; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 1, 3 November 1988; *Jerusalem Post*, 12 December 1988; *Ha'aretz*, 13 December 1988; *Ma'ariv*, 23 December 1988.
 52. *Damascus Domestic Service*, 17, 18, 19 February 1989; *Damascus Television*, 19 February 1989; *New York Times*, 19, 20 February 1989; *Financial Times*, 17, 20 February 1989; *International Herald Tribune*, 28 February 1989.
 53. Al-Shara's interview with *Moscow Television*, 17 February 1989.
 54. *Ma'ariv*, 20 February 1989; *International Herald Tribune*, 28 February 1989.
 55. While reiterating the Soviet opposition to the military option and urging Damascus to soften its political stance, Yazov apparently acquiesced in some of Syria's military requests. On the visit see: *Damascus Domestic Service*, 25 March 1989; TASS, 27, 28, 30 March 1989; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 28 March 1989; *al-Majalah* (London), 5–11 April 1989.
 56. As noted earlier, in December 1989 Asad decided to swallow his pride and re-establish diplomatic relations with Egypt, thereby retreating from his persistent attempts to subvert the Egyptian–Israeli peace and admitting, though indirectly, Syria's inability to attain the cherished 'strategic parity' with Israel. However important, this move still falls short of Moscow's expectations since it does not yet imply Asad's readiness to recognize the State of Israel and make peace with it.
 57. For Soviet dissatisfaction with Syria's Lebanese policy see, for example, TASS, 3 July, 23 August, 27 September 1989; *Izvestiya*, 19 August 1989; Khaddam's interview with *Le Monde*, 28 April 1989; *The Independent*, 6 July 1989; *al-Qabas* (Kuwait), 23, 29 August 1989.
 58. Tlas's interview with *Vienna Television*, 22 September 1987.
 59. *Izvestiya*, 17 December 1988.
 60. TASS, 18 September 1989.

Conclusions

1. International Affairs Guest Club Forum, 'The USSR and the Third World', *International Affairs* (Moscow), December 1988, p. 138.
2. M. Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (London: Fontana, 1988) pp. 137, 140, 143, 148.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
4. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 5 May 1989.
5. Shevardnadze Address in Cairo, 23 February 1989.
6. A. L. Atherton, 'The Soviet Role in the Middle East: An American View', *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1985) pp. 708–9. For a similar view of the Soviet approach see, for example, Freedman, *Soviet Policy toward the Middle East Since 1970*; Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*; Kissinger, *White House Years*, chs 10, 14, 15, 30; D. Pipes, *Orbis*, Summer 1989, p. 468.
7. On these pressures see 'Excerpts of minutes of a meeting between Palestinian and Soviet delegations, the Kremlin, November 13, 1979',

PLO Documents: Samples of Certificates and Documents found in PLO Terrorist headquarters in Southern Lebanon during Operation Peace for Galilee (Jerusalem, 1982) pp. 7–11.

8. M. Zak, *Israel and the Soviet Union – A Forty Years Dialogue* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1988) pp. 131–2 (Hebrew).
9. *Pravda*, 21 July 1982 (emphasis added).
10. F. Halliday, 'Gorbachev and the "Arab Syndrom": Soviet Policy in the Middle East', *World Policy Journal*, Summer 1987, p. 435.
11. Shevardnadze's Address in Cairo, 23 February 1989.

Appendices

Appendix 1 The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Syrian Arab Republic

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Syrian Arab Republic, inspired by the wish to develop and strengthen relations of friendship and all-round cooperation that have formed between them, in the interests of the people of both states, of the cause of security over the world, of consolidation of international detente, and development of peaceful cooperation among states,

Determined to give a firm rebuff to the policy of aggression conducted by imperialism and its accomplices, to continue the struggle against colonialism, neocolonialism and racism in all their forms and manifestations, including Zionism, to come out for national independence and social progress,

Attaching great significance to the continuation of cooperation of both countries in establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East,

Confirming allegiance to the goals and principles of the charter of the United Nations organization, including the principles of respect for sovereignty, national independence, territorial integrity and noninterference in internal affairs,

Decided to conclude the present treaty and agreed on the following:

Article 1

The high contracting parties proclaim their resolve to develop steadily and strengthen friendship and cooperation between both states and peoples in the political, economic, military, scientific, technological, cultural and other spheres on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual advantage, respect for sovereignty, national independence and territorial integrity, and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

Article 2

The high contracting parties shall promote in every way the strengthening of universal peace and security of peoples, the relaxation of international tensions and their implementation in concrete forms of cooperation among states, the settlement of disputable questions by peaceful means, removing any manifestations of the policy of hegemonism and aggression from the practice of international relations.

The sides shall be cooperating intensively with each other in solving the tasks of ending the arms race, of achieving general and complete disarmament, including nuclear disarmament under effective international control.

Article 3

The high contracting parties, guided by their belief in the equality of all peoples and states, regardless of race and religious beliefs, condemn colonialism, racism and Zionism as one of the forms and manifestations of

racism, and reaffirm their resolve to wage tireless struggle against them. The sides will be cooperating with other states in supporting just aspirations of peoples in their struggle against imperialism for ultimate and complete elimination of colonialism and racial domination, for freedom and social progress.

Article 4

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics shall respect the policy of non-alignment pursued by the Syrian Arab Republic, which constitutes a major factor contributing to the preservation and consolidation of the international peace and security and to a lessening of international tensions.

The Syrian Arab Republic shall respect the peaceful foreign policy pursued by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, aimed at consolidating friendship and cooperation with all the countries and peoples.

Article 5

The high contracting parties shall develop and broaden the practice of mutual exchange of opinions and regular consultations on questions of bilateral relations and international problems of interest to both sides, and above all on the problems of the Middle East. Consultations and exchanges of opinion shall be held at different levels, above all through meetings of the leading state figures of both sides.

Article 6

In cases of the emergence of situations jeopardizing peace or security of one of the parties or posing a threat to peace or violating peace and security in the whole world, the high contracting parties shall enter without delay into contact with each other with a view to coordinating their positions and to cooperation in order to remove the threat that has arisen and to restore the peace.

Article 7

The high contracting parties shall carry out close and comprehensive cooperation in assuring conditions for the preservation and development of the social and economic accomplishments of their peoples, for respecting the sovereignty of each of the two parties over their natural resources.

Article 8

The high contracting parties shall contribute to a steady consolidation and broadening of the mutually advantageous economic as well as scientific-technological cooperation and exchange of experience between them in the field of industry, agriculture, irrigation and water resources, utilization of oil and other natural resources, in the field of communications, transport and other economic sectors as well as in the training of national cadres. The sides undertake to broaden trade and maritime navigation between them on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual benefit and the most favoured nation treatment.

Article 9

The high contracting parties shall continue to develop their cooperation and exchange of experience in the fields of science, art, literature, education, health, information, cinematography, tourism, sports and other fields.

The sides undertake to contribute to the expansion of contacts and cooperation between the organs of state power and mass-affiliation organizations, including the trade union and other public organizations, enterprises and cultural and scientific establishments with a view to an increasingly more profound familiarization of the people of both countries with the life, work, experience and achievements of each other.

Article 10

The high contracting parties shall continue to develop cooperation in the military field on the basis of appropriate agreements concluded between them in the interests of strengthening of their defence capacity.

Article 11

Each of the high contracting parties states that it shall not enter into alliances or participate in any groupings of states as well as in activities directed against the other high contracting party.

Article 12

Each of the high contracting parties states that its obligations under the current international agreements do not contradict the provisions of this treaty, and undertakes not to conclude any international agreements which are incompatible with it.

Article 13

Any differences that may arise between the high contracting parties in the interpretation or application of any provision of this treaty shall be resolved on a bilateral basis, in the spirit of friendship, mutual understanding and respect.

Article 14

This treaty shall be effective for twenty years as of the day it enters into force.

If neither of the high contracting parties states six months prior to the expiry of the above mentioned period its desire to terminate the treaty, it shall remain effective for the next five years until one of the high contracting parties notifies in writing six months prior to the expiry of the current five-year period its intention to terminate it.

Article 15

This treaty is subject to ratification and shall enter into force on the day of the exchange of ratification instruments, which shall be done in Damascus.

Done in Moscow on 8 October 1980, in duplicate, each in Russian and Arabic languages, with both texts being equally authentic.

Appendix 2 The Soviet Proposal for a Middle East Settlement, *Pravda*, 29 July 1984

Being concerned over the remaining explosive situation in the Middle East, the Soviet Union is profoundly convinced that the vital interests of the peoples of that region, and likewise the interests of international security as a whole, urgently dictate the need for the speediest attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict.

It is likewise firmly convinced that such a comprehensive, truly just and really lasting settlement can be drawn up and implemented only through collective efforts with the participation of all sides concerned.

Proceeding from this and wishing to contribute to establishing peace in the Middle East, it puts forward the following proposals on the principles of Middle East settlement and ways towards reaching it.

Principles of Middle East Settlement:

1. The principle of inadmissibility of capture of foreign lands through aggression should be strictly observed. Accordingly, all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 – the Golan Heights, the West Bank of the Jordan River and Gaza sector, the Lebanese lands – should be returned to the Arabs. The settlements established by Israel in the Arab territories after 1967 should be dismantled. The borders between Israel and its Arab neighbours should be declared inviolable.

2. Implementation in practice should be ensured of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people, whose sole legitimate representative is the Palestine Liberation Organization, to self-determination, to creating its own independent state on the Palestinian lands, which will be freed from the Israeli occupation – on the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza sector. As is envisaged by the decision of the general Arab summit meeting in Fez and with the consent of the Palestinians themselves, the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza sector can be turned over by Israel under the control of the United Nations Organization for a short transition period of not more than several months.

After the creation of an independent Palestinian state, it will, naturally, itself, by virtue of the sovereign rights inherent in every state, determine the character of its relations with the neighbour countries, including the possibility of forming a confederation.

The Palestinian refugees should be granted the opportunity envisaged by the U.N. decisions to return to their homes or receive appropriate compensation for the property left behind by them.

3. The eastern part of Jerusalem, which was occupied by Israel in 1967 and which is the site of one of the main Muslim shrines, should be returned to the Arabs and become an inalienable part of the Palestinian state. The freedom of access of believers to the sacred shrines of the three religions should be ensured all over Jerusalem.

4. The right of all states in that area to secure and independent existence and development should be really ensured, certainly, with the observance of full reciprocity, as the genuine security of some people cannot be ensured through flouting the security of others.

5. An end should be put to the state of war and peace be established between the Arab states and Israel. This means that all the sides to the conflict, including Israel and the Palestinian state, should commit themselves to honour mutually the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of each other, to resolve arising disputes through peaceful means, through talks.

6. International settlement guarantees should be drawn up and adopted, the role of the guarantor could be assumed, for example, by the permanent members of the UN Security Council or the Security Council as a whole. The Soviet Union is ready to participate in such guarantees.

Ways Towards Reaching Settlement. Experience has most convincingly demonstrated the futility and at the same time the danger of the attempts at resolving the Middle East problem through forcing on the Arabs all sorts of separate deals with Israel.

The sole right and effective way towards ensuring a radical solution to the Middle East problem is that of collective efforts by all the sides concerned, in other words, talks within the framework of an international conference on the Middle East especially convened [for accomplishing this goal].

In the opinion of the Soviet Union, in convening such a conference it is necessary to be guided by the following provisions.

Aims of the conference. The objective of the conference should be to find solutions to all aspects of Middle East settlement. . . .

The conference should end in the signing of a treaty or treaties embracing the following organically interconnected components of settlement: Withdrawal of Israeli troops from all the Arab territories occupied since 1967, implementation of the legitimate national rights of the Arab people of Palestine, including its right to the creation of its own state; establishing the state of peace and ensuring security and independent development to all the states [which are] sides to the conflict. Simultaneously, international guarantees for the observance of the terms of such a settlement should be drawn up and adopted. All the agreements reached at the conference should make an integral whole approved by all of its participants.

Composition of participants. All the Arab states having a common border with Israel, i.e. Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Israel itself, should have the right to participate in the conference.

The Palestine Liberation Organization should be an equal participant in the conference as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. This is a question of principled significance, as a Middle East settlement is unattainable without the resolution of the Palestinian problem, and it cannot be resolved without the participation of the PLO.

The USSR and USA should also be participants in the conference as they play, by force of circumstances, an important role in Middle East affairs and were co-chairmen of the preceding conference on the Middle East.

Some other states of the Middle East and of the areas adjoining it, capable of making a positive contribution to the settlement of the Middle East problem, could be included into the number of participants in the conference with general consent.

Organizing the conference's work. Like the preceding one, a new conference

on the Middle East should be held under the aegis of the United Nations Organization.

The main form of work of the conference could be working groups (commissions) created from among representatives of all the participants in the conference to examine key issues of settlement (withdrawal of Israeli troops and the border line; the Palestinian problem; the question of Jerusalem; an end to the state of war and establishment of peace; the problem of security of the states which participated in the conflict; international guarantees for the observance of the agreements, etc.).

If necessary, bilateral groups could be set up to hammer out details of the agreements concerning only these two countries.

To examine the results of the activities of the working groups (commissions) and when necessary in other cases, plenary meetings should be held to endorse its decisions, with the common consent of all the participants in the conference.

At the initial stage of the conference is work, the states participating in it could be represented by foreign ministers, and subsequently – by specially appointed representatives; when necessary, the ministers could periodically attend the further work of the conference.

* * *

Guided by the aim of establishing a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and eliminating the explosive situation in that area, the Soviet Union appeals to all the sides in the conflict [to proceed] from a sober assessment of each other's legitimate rights and interests, while all other states should not hamper, but contribute to a quest for such a settlement.

Appendix 3 Gorbachev's Speech at Dinner for Asad, TASS 24 April 1987

Dear friend Hafiz al-Asad, esteemed Syrian guests, comrades. We are glad to welcome in Moscow again the leader of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Soviet Union and Syria are linked by friendly ties of many years.

Our all-round cooperation is based on common interests concerning the main issues of the present. This has again been confirmed in the course of the talks today. I wish to mention in particular that readiness has been reaffirmed to assist Syria further in maintaining its capacity for defence at the proper level.

We view the visit of the high Syrian delegation as an important milestone in the development of our relations – political, economic and cultural; relations along public and parliamentary lines; and inter-party relations. Friendship and trust between our peoples and their leaderships have been confirmed again and fresh stimuli have been given to them.

Our country has respect and sympathy for the freedom-loving Syrian people and their determination to build a progressive modern society which has inherited the true values of their past and is worthy of their country's glorious history. Among the features of Syria today are dozens of modern industrial plants. They incorporate the work of Soviet people too. I say that

with pleasure. Our cooperation is now being put into orbit. A joint Soviet-Syrian space mission is to be held soon.

Your visit, esteemed President, Syrian friends, is being paid at a time when revolutionary transformations have got under way in the Land of the Soviets. Restructuring and acceleration will elevate socialism to a qualitatively new stage. Socialism will get everything it needs in order to fulfil in the 21st century too its mission as the greatest factor for peace and progress. Its ability to give assistance to other peoples which have independently embarked upon their path of development – that of freedom, elimination of backwardness and active independent participation in all world affairs – will also grow considerably.

Having started such a deep turn inside the country, we are, naturally, interested in the far-reaching restructuring of international relations. Yet our active foreign policy initiatives are determined not by our national interests alone. New political thinking and the new foreign policy practices which correspond to it are based on a realistic analysis of the world today which has recently undergone great changes. They take into account the diverse and contradictory forces which now make up world politics. They are motivated by a realization of responsibility for the survival of mankind. This is a problem which must be a factor in approaches to any major issues that have any international aspects. Hence our idea of building a nuclear-free world, hence the concept of creating a comprehensive international security system based on the principles of equal security for all.

The other day we put forward new proposals on disarmament problems. Most statesmen and political figures and the general public have welcomed them. Yet there is a commotion again among the ruling circles of NATO just as after Reykjavik. All sorts of inventions are being launched into the public and new fears are being built up. They are again confusing themselves and the public by the suspicions: what does Moscow have on its mind? why such bold steps? isn't it simply a screen over cunning and deception designed to lull the vigilance of some and divide everyone, and then crush Western Europe? The very idea of ridding Europe of nuclear arsenals is declared harmful. It is bitter and ludicrous to see all this in print. One can't help asking again: what are you afraid of, gentlemen? Is it really so difficult to rise to the present political level in evaluating the truly historic processes which have got under way in the Soviet Union, in the whole of the socialist world? Is it really beyond you to understand the objective, inseparable connection of these processes with genuinely good intentions in foreign policy?

We are not against our fresh initiatives being subjected to serious discussion at competent and responsible levels. This is natural. It is important, however, that these discussions be aimed at a search for mutually acceptable, fair solutions and not at trying to find out how to thwart the whole thing again in as 'decent' a manner as possible.

They are out to confuse people not only as regards medium-range missiles, but also as regards other proposals presented to George Shultz in Moscow. Propaganda is already being built up, again raising publicity waves around SDI alleging it to be a system of defence. Look, they say, the Americans are looking for a way out along the lines of making weapons defensive while the Russians as always are emphasizing offensive weapons. But how do matters

actually stand? The USSR opposes the race in both defensive and offensive weapons, and favours the elimination of all types of nuclear weapons. The USA, for its part, is engaged not only in SDI. It is stepping up the production and perfection of missiles, aircraft and new warheads designed precisely to penetrate our defences and, it must be noted moreover, it has so far been spending far more on this than on SDI.

Then again, isn't the destruction of nuclear weapons, which is our call, the best, the surest way to strengthen defence? On top of that, the very notions 'defence', 'offensive', have become anachronisms in this nuclear age. Another point should be discussed – that of preventing war. Herein lies the novelty of the situation for both politicians and generals. But the main means of defence, if that is what we are talking about, is mutual disarmament.

The edifice of peace, especially in the nuclear epoch, cannot be durable if at least a part of it remains outside the security system. That is why the USSR strongly favours unblocking situations of conflict, the so-called regional conflicts.

A special place among them is occupied by the Near East problem – one of the most chronic and involved. For two decades now – and if we measure it from the very outset, even twice as long – it has been crippling the lives and prospects of the peoples of the Near East: billions spent on military needs, bloody clashes one after another, human casualties almost every day, political and psychological tensions, an atmosphere of fear and lack of confidence. It is impossible to put up with this any longer. This situation affects the economy, hampers development, leads to a fall in living standards and the accumulation of social problems, and creates zones of real calamity for the people. Gambling on military force in settling the conflict has become completely discredited. It would seem that there is more than enough proof of this.

The principal source of the persisting conflict is the expansionist policy of the Washington-backed ruling circles of Israel. The USA regards the Near East as a test range for its imperial policy. The USA, we have noticed, is using regional conflicts in general for manipulating the level of tension and confrontation.

We are in solidarity with the Arabs who refuse to recognize the occupation of their lands. We categorically condemn discrimination against the Palestinian people, which is denied the right to self-determination and the right to have a homeland. In the future, as in the past, we shall oppose any separate deals, as they only harm and thwart the search for a genuine settlement.

Israeli leaders are stubbornly clinging to a policy which has no prospects. They are trying to build the security of their country by intimidating its neighbours and are using all means, right down to state terrorism, for that purpose. This is a faulty and short-sighted policy, the more so since it is directed against almost 200 million Arabs. There is another, correct and reliable, way for ensuring a secure future for the state of Israel. It is a just peace and, in the final analysis, good-neighbourly relations with the Arabs.

Much has been said lately concerning relations between the Soviet Union and Israel, and a lot of cock-and-bull stories are being piled up too. Let me put it straight: the absence of such relations cannot be considered normal. But they were severed through Israel's fault in the first place. It happened as

a result of the aggression against the Arab countries. We recognize without any reservations – to the same extent as with regard to the other states – the right of Israel to peace and a secure existence. At the same time, just as in the past, the Soviet Union is categorically opposed to Tel Aviv's policy of strength and annexations. It should be plain: changes for the better in relations with Israel are conceivable only in the mainstream of the process of a settlement in the Near East. This issue cannot be taken out of this context. This interrelationship has been created by the course of events, by Israel's policy.

We are confident that preparations for an international conference on the Near East involving all the sides concerned should be a focal point for collective efforts to bring about a settlement. This idea, as you know, has had a chequered history and was not grasped at once. But the past years have demonstrated that it is the only way out of the impasse. Today it would not be an exaggeration to say that a substantial part of the international community of nations favours such a conference. Even the USA and Israel cannot maintain an openly negative stand. The time has come to start careful and painstaking preparatory work. The permanent members of the Security Council could take the initiative in that matter. The Soviet Union, let me reaffirm it, is prepared for loyal and constructive efforts on a collective and bilateral basis.

During our conversations we discussed these issues in sufficient detail. I can only express satisfaction at the fact that the Syrian leadership is unswervingly following the course towards a political settlement.

It is absolutely obvious that much will depend in this respect on the political activity and persistence of the Arab states and on coordination between them. We are saddened by disunity, frictions and conflicts in the Arab world which are vigorously exploited by imperialists and their henchmen. Naturally we saw a good sign in the current efforts to restore the unity of the PLO.

Making sacrifices and suffering deprivations, the Syrian Arab Republic has for many years now been courageously resisting aggression, the policy of dictate and neo-colonialist plans. Its vanguard positions in the anti-imperialist struggle are indisputable. Its role is also indispensable in consolidating the Arab world along the lines of a Near East settlement, the most important aim of which is the return of the territories seized by Israel and the exercise of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

Now that preparatory work for an international conference on the Near East appears on the order of the day a common Arab stand on that matter is especially important. Here, in our opinion, the activity and authority of our Syrian friends can become a decisive factor.

In conclusion, let me express confidence that cooperation and interaction between the Soviet Union and Syria sealed by the 1980 treaty will continue to develop successfully in the interests of our peoples and for the benefit of peace and progress in the Near East and the world over. I wish good health to you, Comrade al-Asad, and to all Syrian guests, and peace and prosperity to the friendly Syrian people.

Bibliography

Books and Monographs

- Agwani, Mohamed Shafi, *Communism in the Arab East* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1969).
- Brutents, Karen N., *National-Liberation Revolutions Today* (Moscow: Progress, 1977).
- , *The Newly Free Countries in the Seventies* (Moscow: Progress, 1983).
- Bulloch, John, *Death of a Country: The Civil War in Lebanon* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977).
- Buss, Robin, *Wary Partners: The Soviet Union and Arab Socialism* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1970, Adelphi Paper No. 70).
- Cassen, Robert (ed.), *Soviet Interests in the Third World* (London and Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1985).
- Confino, Michael and Shamir, Shimon (eds), *The USSR and the Middle East* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973).
- Dawisha, Adeed, *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis* (London and New York: Macmillan and St Martins Press, 1980).
- Dawisha, Adeed and Karen (eds), *The Soviet Union in the Middle East* (London: Heinemann for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1982).
- Dawisha, Karen, *Soviet Foreign Policy towards Egypt* (London: Macmillan, 1979).
- Devlin, John, *The Ba'th Party: History from its Origins to 1966* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976).
- Dismukes, Bradford and McConnell, James (eds), *Soviet Naval Diplomacy* (New York: Pergamon, 1979).
- Filonik, A. O., *Agrarniye Problemi Sovremennoi Syrii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1981).
- Freedman, Robert O., *Soviet Policy toward the Middle East Since 1970*, Third Edition (New York: Praeger, 1982).
- George, Alexander (ed.), *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1983).
- Glassman, Jon D., *Arms for the Arabs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).
- Golan, Galia, *Yom Kippur and After: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- Golan, Matti, *The Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976).
- Gorbachev, Mikhail, *Perestroika (New Thinking for Our Country and the World)* (London: Fontana, 1988).
- Halliday, Fred, *Soviet Policy in the Arc of Crisis* (Washington DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1981).

- Heikal, Muhammad, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents* (London: New English Library, 1972).
- , *The Road to Ramadan* (London: Collins, 1975).
- , *Sphinx and Commissar: the Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).
- Herzog, Chaim, *The War of Atonement* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975).
- Hosmer, Stephen T. and Wolfe, Thomas, *Soviet Policy and Practice Toward Third World Conflicts* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1983).
- Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, *The Yom Kippur War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974).
- Kalb, Marvin and Bernard, *Kissinger* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974).
- Kanet, Roger E. (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy in the 1980s* (New York: Praeger, 1982).
- Kanovsky, Eliyahu, *What's Behind Syria's Current Economic Problems?* (Tel Aviv: The Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1985).
- Kaplan, Stephen S. (ed.), *Diplomacy of Power: Soviet Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1981).
- Karsh, Efraim, *Soviet Arms Transfers to the Middle East in the 1970s* (Tel Aviv: The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1983, JCSS Paper No. 22).
- , *The Cautious Bear: Soviet Military Engagement in Middle East Wars in the Post-1967 Era* (Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1985).
- , *The Soviet Union and Syria* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).
- Kass, Ilana, *The Lebanon Civil War 1975–1976: A Case of Crisis Mismanagement* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1979).
- Kissinger, Henry, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979).
- , *Years of Upheaval* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982).
- Kohler, F., Goure, L. and Harvey, M. L., *The Soviet Union and the October Middle East War: The Implications for Détente* (Miami: Center for Advanced International Studies, 1974).
- Laqueur, Walter, *The Soviet Union and the Middle East* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959).
- , *The Struggle for the Middle East: The Soviet Union and the Middle East, 1958–68* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).
- , *Confrontation: The Middle East in World Politics* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974).
- Lenczowski, George, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East* (Washington DC: AEI, 1971).
- Lutsky, V., *Modern History of the Arab Countries* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969).
- Mangold, Peter, *Superpower Intervention in the Middle East* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).
- Ma'oz, Moshe, *Syria Under Hafiz al-Asad: New Domestic and Foreign Policies* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1975).
- , *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988).
- , and Yaniv, Avner (eds), *Syria Under Asad* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).
- Maurer, J. H. and Porth, R. H. (eds), *Military Intervention in the Third World* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

- McLaurin, R. D., *The Middle East in Soviet Policy* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1975).
- , et al., *Middle East Foreign Policy: Issues and Processes* (New York: Praeger, 1982).
- Pennar, Jaan, *The USSR and the Arabs: The Ideological Dimension* (London: C. Hurst, 1973).
- Porter, Bruce D., *The USSR in Third World Conflicts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- Primakov, Yevgen, *Anatomy of the Middle East Conflict* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979).
- Quandt, William, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967–1976* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
- Ra'anani, Gavriel D., *The Evolution of the Soviet Use of Surrogates in Military Relations in the Third World, with Particular Emphasis on Cuban Participation in Africa* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1979).
- Rabinovich, Itamar, *Syria Under the Ba'th 1963–66* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1972).
- , *The War for Lebanon, 1970–1983* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984).
- Ro'i, Yaacov (ed.), *From Encroachment to Involvement: A Documentary Study of Soviet Policy in the Middle East* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1974).
- , (ed.), *The Limits to Power: Soviet Policy in the Middle East* (London: Croom Helm, 1979).
- Rubinstein, Alvin Z., *Red Star on the Nile* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).
- Saivet, Carol R. and Woodby, Sylvia, *Soviet Third World Relations* (Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1985).
- Schmid, Alex P., *Soviet Military Interventions Since 1945* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985).
- Seale, Patrick, *The Struggle for Syria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).
- , *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988).
- Sheehan, Edward, *The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976).
- Tias, Mustafa, *Al-Gazw al-Israili Li Lubnan* (Damascus: Tishrin, 1983).
- Valkenier, Elizabeth K., *The Soviet Union and the Third World: An Economic Bind* (New York: Praeger, 1983).
- Van Dam, Nicholas, *The Struggle for Power in Syria* (London: Croom Helm, 1979).
- Weinberger, Naomi J., *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: The 1975–76 Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- Whetten, Lawrence, *The Canal War: Four Power Conflict in the Middle East* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974).
- Yodfat, Aryeh, *Arab Politics in the Soviet Mirror* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1974).

Articles

- Alexandrov, V., 'Middle East: A New Step Toward Peace', *International Affairs* (Moscow), no. 8 (August 1974) pp. 86–8.
- Alov, O., 'Wanted: A Genuine Mid-East Settlement', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 14 (April 1975) pp. 8–9.
- , 'The Settlement Issue', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 12 (1977) pp. 4–5.
- Atherton, Alfred L., 'The Soviet Role in the Middle East: An American View', *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1985) pp. 688–715.
- Bakdash, Khalid, 'International Policy and the National Struggle of the Communists', *World Marxist Review*, vol. 18, no. 10 (October 1975) pp. 10–22.
- Belayev, Igor, 'Who Is Inflaming the Hotbed of Tensions?', *Za Rubezhom*, 28 February–6 March 1975, pp. 10–11.
- Bennett, Alexander, 'Arms Transfers as an Instrument of Soviet Policy in the Middle East', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1985) pp. 745–74.
- Ben-Porat, Yoel, 'The Yom Kippur War: A Mistake in May and a Surprise in October', *Ma'arachot* (Tel Aviv), no. 299 (July–August 1985) pp. 2–9 (Hebrew).
- Ben-Tzur, I., 'The New-Ba'th Party of Syria', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 3 (1968) pp. 161–81.
- Cooley, John, 'The Shifting Sands of Arab Communism', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 24, no. 2 (March–April 1975) pp. 22–42.
- Dawisha, Adeed, 'Syria and the Sadat Initiative', *The World Today*, vol. 34 (1978) pp. 192–8.
- , 'Syria Under Asad, 1970–1978: The Centers of Power', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 13 (1978) pp. 341–54.
- Dawisha, Karen, 'Soviet Decision-Making in the Middle East: The 1973 October War and the Gulf War', *International Affairs* (London), vol. 57, no. 1 (Winter 1980/81) pp. 43–59.
- , 'Soviet Cultural Relations with Iraq, Syria and Egypt, 1955–1970', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1975) pp. 418–440.
- , 'The USSR in the Middle East: Superpower in Eclipse?', *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1982–3 pp. 436–52.
- Demchenko, Pavel, 'The Middle East: From War to Peace', *International Affairs* (Moscow), no. 5 (May 1974) pp. 66–9.
- Dmitriyev, Y., 'A Major Stage in the Struggle for Peace in the Middle East', *International Affairs* (Moscow), no. 4 (April 1975) pp. 34–40.
- , 'Middle East: Need for a Just Settlement', *International Affairs* (Moscow), no. 8 (August 1975) pp. 73–8.
- Fomin, O., 'Arabization of Camp David?', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 29 (July 1985) pp. 10–11.
- , 'The Casablanca Summit', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 34 (August 1985) pp. 10–11.
- Freedman, Robert O., 'The Soviet Union and the Communist Parties of the Arab World: An Uncertain Relationship', in R. Kanet & D. Bahry (eds),

- Soviet Economic and Political Relations with the Developing World* (New York: Praeger, 1975) pp. 100–134.
- , 'Moscow and a Middle East Peace Settlement', *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 1985, pp. 143–61.
- , 'Moscow, Damascus and the Lebanese Crisis', in M. Ma'oz and A. Yaniv (eds), *Syria Under Asad* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986) pp. 224–47.
- Golan, Galia, 'Syria and the Soviet Union since the Yom Kippur War', *Orbis*, vol. 21 (Winter 1978) pp. 777–801.
- , 'The Middle East', in Kurt London (ed.), *The Soviet Union in World Politics* (London and Boulder: Croom Helm and Westview Press, 1980) pp. 105–127.
- , 'The Soviet Union and the Israeli Action in Lebanon', *International Affairs* (London), vol. 59, no. 1 (Winter 1982/83) pp. 7–17.
- , 'Soviet Decisionmaking in the Yom Kippur War, 1973', in Jiri Valenta and William C. Potter (eds), *Soviet Decisionmaking For National Security* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984) pp. 185–217.
- , 'The Soviet Union and the PLO since the War in Lebanon', *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Spring 1986) pp. 285–305.
- , 'Gorbachev's Middle East Strategy', *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1987, pp. 41–57.
- and Rabinovich, Itamar, 'The Soviet Union and Syria: The Limits of Cooperation', in Y. Ro'i (ed.), *The Limits to Power*, (London: Croom Helm, 1979) pp. 213–32.
- Goodman, Melvin A. and McGiffert Ekedahl, Carolyn, 'Gorbachev's "New Directions" in the Middle East', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4 (Autumn 1988) pp. 571–86.
- Halliday, Fred, 'Gorbachev and the "Arab Syndrom": Soviet Policy in the Middle East', *World Policy Journal*, Summer 1987, pp. 415–42.
- , 'Mikhail and the Mullahs', *Marxism Today*, February 1989, pp. 24–7.
- Hansen, James, 'Moscow and Damascus: How Binding the Ties?', *International Defense Review*, August 1988, pp. 925–9.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond A., 'Revisionist Dreams, Realist Strategies: The Foreign Policy of Syria', in B. Korani and A. E. Hillal Dessouki (eds), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States* (Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1984) pp. 283–322.
- Horelick, Arnold L., 'Soviet Policy in the Middle East', in P. Y. Hammond and S. S. Alexander (eds), *Political Dynamics in the Middle East* (New York: American Elsevier, 1972) pp. 553–604.
- Howard, Harry N., 'The Soviet Union in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan', in I. J. Lederer and W. S. Vucinich (eds), *The Soviet Union and the Middle East* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974) pp. 134–56.
- Ignatov, Alexander, 'This Spring in Damascus', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 24 (June 1974) pp. 26–9.
- Imam, Zafar, 'Soviet Treaties with Third World Countries', *Soviet Studies*, vol. xxxv, no. 1 (January 1983) pp. 53–70.
- International Affairs Guest Club, 'The USSR and the Third World', *International Affairs* (Moscow), 12/1988, pp. 133–46.

- Irwin, Zachary, 'The USSR and Israel', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 36, nos 1–2 (January–February 1987) pp. 36–45.
- Jabber, Paul and Kolkowicz, Roman, 'The Arab-Israeli Wars of 1967 and 1973', in S. Kaplan (ed.), *Diplomacy of Power*, (Washington DC: Brookings, 1981).
- Ja'far, Kasem M., 'The Soviet Union in the Middle East: A Case Study of Syria', in Robert Cassen (ed.), *Soviet Interests in the Third World* (London and Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1985).
- Karsh, Efraim, 'The Myth of "Direct Soviet Intervention" in an Arab-Israeli War', *RUSI Journal*, vol. 129, no. 3 (September 1984) pp. 28–32.
- , 'Soviet Arms for the Love of Allah', *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, vol. 110, no. 4 (April 1984) pp. 44–51.
- , 'Soviet-Israeli Relations: A New Phase?', *The World Today*, vol. 41, no. 12 (December 1985) pp. 214–18.
- , 'Moscow and the Yom Kippur War: A Reappraisal', *Soviet-Jewish Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1986) pp. 3–19.
- , 'Influence Through Arms Supplies: The Soviet Experience in the Middle East', *Conflict Quarterly*, vol. VI, no. 1 (Winter 1986) pp. 45–56.
- , 'Peacetime Presence and Wartime Engagement: The Soviet Case', in Steven Spiegel *et al* (eds), *The Soviet-American Competition in the Middle East* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1988) pp. 145–59.
- , 'A Marriage of Convenience: The Soviet Union and Asad's Syria', *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, vol. 11, no. 4 (December 1989) pp. 1–26.
- Kerr, Malcolm H., 'Hafiz Asad and the Changing Patterns of Syrian Politics', *International Journal*, vol. 28 (1973) pp. 689–706.
- Khalidi, Rashid, 'Arab Views on the Soviet Role in the Middle East', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1985) pp. 716–32.
- Klimov, Alexander, 'Ancient Syria Today', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 16 (1976) pp. 24–5.
- Kudryavtsev, Victor, 'Generator of Middle East Tension', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 4 (January 1975) pp. 12–13.
- Lenczowski, George, 'Socialism in Syria', in H. Desfosses and J. Levesque (eds), *Socialism in the Third World* (New York: Praeger 1975) pp. 55–76.
- Levy, Avigdor, 'The Syrian Communists and the Ba'th Power Struggle, 1966–1970', in M. Confino and S. Shamir (eds), *The USSR and the Middle East* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1973) pp. 395–417.
- Ma'oz, Moshe, 'Alawi Military Officers in Syrian Politics', in H. Z. Schiffrin (ed.), *The Military and State in Modern Asia* (Jerusalem: Academic Press, 1976) pp. 277–97.
- , 'Hafiz al-Asad: A Political Profile', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 8 (1978) pp. 16–31.
- Medvedko, Leonid, 'Syria After February', *International Affairs* (Moscow), no. 7 (1966) pp. 63–8, 77.
- , 'Syria Fights and Works', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 11 (March 1974) pp. 8–9.
- , 'High Time for a Middle East Settlement', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 52 (December 1975) pp. 24–5.

- , 'Middle East: Fictions and Realities', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 40 (October 1978) pp. 6–7.
- , 'Lebanon: Twenty Five Years Later', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 41 (October 1983) pp. 10–12.
- Mirsky, Georgy, 'The Changing Arab East', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 2 (January 1964) pp. 3–6.
- , 'The Middle East: New Factors', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 48 (1973) pp. 18–19.
- Napper, Larry C., 'The Arab Autumn of 1984: A Case Study of Soviet Middle East Diplomacy', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1985) pp. 733–44.
- Nikolayev, V., 'Trying Days for Lebanon', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 16 (1976) pp. 10–11.
- , "'Quiet Americans" on Arab Soil', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 37 (September 1983) pp. 8–9.
- Ofer, Gur, 'The Economic Burden of Soviet Involvement in the Middle East', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3 (January 1973) pp. 329–47.
- Oren, Stephen, 'Syria's Options', *The World Today*, vol. 30 (1974) pp. 472–5.
- Pajak, Rojer F., 'Soviet Military Aid to Iraq and Syria', *Strategic Review*, Winter 1976, pp. 51–9.
- Pennar, Jaan, 'The Arabs, Marxism and Moscow: A Historical Survey', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 22, no. 3 (September 1968) pp. 433–47.
- , 'The Soviet Road to Damascus', *Mizan*, January–February 1967, pp. 23–9.
- Pipes, Daniel, 'Syria: The Cuba of the Middle East?', *Commentary*, July 1986, pp. 15–22.
- Porkovsky, Anatoly, 'Friendship Born in Space', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 32 (August 1987) p. 5.
- Potomov, Yuri, 'Middle East Settlement: Urgent Task', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 31 (August 1974) pp. 21–2.
- , 'The Lebanon Crisis: Who Stands to Gain?', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 26 (1976) pp. 8–9.
- , 'Middle East: Peace Treaty or Military Compact?', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 14 (April 1979) pp. 4–5.
- , 'USSR–Syria: Realistic Approach', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 18 (May 1987) p. 8.
- Prignetov, Alexei, 'Lebanon: First Steps toward Settlement', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 44 (1976) pp. 14–15.
- Primakov, Yevgeny, "'Sbalansirovanny Kurs" na Blizhnem Vostoke ili staraya politika inymi sredstvami?', *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodniye Otnasheniia*, no. 12 (1976) pp. 46–50.
- , 'USSR Policy on Regional Conflicts', *International Affairs* (Moscow), no. 6, 1988, pp. 3–9.
- Ra'anani, Uri, 'The USSR and the Middle East: Some Reflections on the Soviet Decisionmaking Process', *Orbis*, vol. 17 (1973) pp. 946–78.
- Ramet, Pedro, 'The Soviet–Syrian Relationship', *Problems of Communism*, September–October 1986, pp. 35–46.

- Roberts, Cynthia A., 'Soviet Arms-Transfer Policy and the Decision to Upgrade Syrian Air Defences', *Survival*, July–August 1983, pp. 154–64.
- Rumyantsev, V., 'Syria on the Alert', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 40 (1972), pp. 8–9.
- Schreiber, J., 'Growth of Peace Sentiment in Israel', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 26 (1975) pp. 10–11.
- Shelepin, Vladimir, 'Syria: Confidence in the Future', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 9 (February 1978) pp. 23–4.
- Spechler, Dina R., 'The Politics of Intervention: The Soviet Union and the Crisis in Lebanon', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, vol. XX, no. 2 (Summer 1987) pp. 115–43.
- Stepanov, Andrei, 'Lebanon: Another Camp David?', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 42 (October 1978) pp. 6–7.
- , 'Syria: On Guard', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 16 (April 1979) pp. 14–15.
- , 'Syria: The Front is Right Next Door', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 3 (January 1983) pp. 22–4.
- , 'USSR–Syria: Consistent Support', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 42 (October 1983) p. 13.
- , 'Syria: Advancing and Surmounting Obstacles', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 42 (October 1985) pp. 20–1.
- Tolkunov, Lev, 'Blizhnii Vostok: Istoki Krizisa i Puti Ego Uregulirovaniia', *Kommunist*, no. 13 (September 1974).
- Torrey, Gordon H., 'The Ba'th: Ideology and Practice', *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 23 (1973) pp. 445–70.
- Tsaplin, Y., 'Teaming Up', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 48 (1976) p. 23.
- Tyunkov, Y., 'USSR–Syria: There is Much That Unites Us', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 10 (March 1978) pp. 6–7.
- , 'USSR–Syria: Strengthening Cooperation', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 18 (April 1977) p. 7.
- Ulansky, A., 'USSR and Syria: Solidarity and Co-operation', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 15 (April 1974) p. 6.
- Usvatov, A., 'Lebanon: Washington Pulls the Trigger', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 39 (September 1983) pp. 10–11.
- Van Dusen, Michael H., 'Political Integration and Regionalism in Syria', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 26 (1972) pp. 123–36.
- , 'Syria: Downfall of a Traditional Elite', in F. Tachau (ed.), *Political Elites and Political Development in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Mass.: Schenkman, 1975) pp. 115–55.
- Vasilyev, R., 'New Horizons of Soviet–Syrian Friendship', *International Affairs* (Moscow), no. 7 (July 1974) pp. 85–8.
- Viktorov, L., 'Ba'thisti na Sluzhbe Reactsii', *Sovremenni Vostok*, January 1960, pp. 27–8.
- Vladimirov, V., 'A Peaceful Settlement for the Middle East', *International Affairs* (Moscow), no. 11 (November 1974) pp. 11–113.
- Volsky, Dmitry, 'Blizhnii Vostok: Otvestvenni Etap', *Novoe Vremya*, no. 45 (November 1974) p. 6.
- , 'A Step Towards Settlement', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 23 (June 1974) pp. 8–9.

- , 'Arab East: "Miracles" and Realities', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 24 (June 1974) pp. 12–13.
- , 'The Soviet–Syrian Meeting', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 40 (October 1974) p. 5.
- , 'Middle East: Time Presses', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 42 (October 1974) pp. 8–9.
- , 'After the Rabat Meeting', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 45 (November 1974) pp. 10–11.
- , 'Blackmailing the Arabs', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 2 (January 1975) pp. 10–11.
- , 'Behind the Conflicts', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 34 (1977) pp. 8–9.
- , 'The Camp David Deal', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 39 (September 1978) pp. 8–9.
- , 'Damascus The Target?', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 7 (January 1983) p. 7.
- , 'The Threat to Damascus', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 18 (May 1983) p. 15.
- , 'Illusory Goals of the Adventurists', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 40 (October 1983) pp. 5–6.
- , 'The Inter-Palestinian Conflict', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 49 (December 1983) p. 15.
- , 'Building on Sand', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 50 (December 1983) pp. 10–13.
- Zgersky, D., 'Syria A Target', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 48 (November 1983) p. 15.
- , and P. Davydov, 'A Threat Not Only to the Arabs – That's Clearly to be Seen from Damascus', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 4 (January 1986) pp. 13–16.
- Zhitomirsky, Vladimir, 'A Splendid View of Syria', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 31 (August 1987) p. 5.
- Zotov, Alexander, 'Is Long-Awaited Settlement in Sight?', *New Times* (Moscow), no. 22 (June 1987) pp. 13–15.

Index

- Abu Musa 152, 154
 Afghanistan 1, 3–4, 123–4, 142, 178, 181
 Ahmad, Iskandar Ahmad 23, 107, 115, 120
 Ahmar, Abdallah al- 77
 Algeria 47, 103, 116, 124, 135
 Aliyev, Geidar 158
 Amal 164, 166, 175
 Andropov, Yuri A. 8, 28, 146–7, 150, 154–9, 163, 180
 Aoun, Michel 28, 177
 Arafat, Yasser 26, 90, 94, 149–50, 152, 154, 157–8, 161–3, 166–9, 171, 174, 181
 Asad, Hafiz
 and the Arab–Israeli conflict 8, 12–13, 17–22, 71, 76–7
 and strategic parity 8, 18, 21, 39, 41, 58, 96, 115–20, 125, 127, 161, 198–9 n19
 attitude to the USSR 6, 36, 52, 64–5, 76
 perception of an Arab–Israeli peace 17–22, 36, 76–8, 81–2, 84, 99–100, 113, 175, 185 n24
 visits to Moscow 20, 30, 32, 36–7, 39, 53–4, 58–9, 68–70, 84–5, 89, 91, 97, 111–12, 119–23, 126–7, 132, 145, 147, 159–61, 166–8, 169–71, 180–1, 205 n42
 Asad, Rif'at 159, 205 n40
 Atasi, Nur Al-Din al- 66
 Ayubi, Mahmoud al- 72, 77
 Aziz, Tareq 158

 Baghdad Pact 3, 4
 Baghdad Summit (1978) 47, 57, 123, 165
 Bakdash, Khaled 5, 64, 65
 Ba'th Party 5, 6, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67–9, 121, 126
 Begin, Menachem 113–14, 116, 130–1, 133–4, 136–7, 140–1
 Belayev, Igor 89
 Berri, Nabih 151, 164
 Bovin, Alexander 141, 162
 Brezhnev, Leonid I. 7, 8, 14, 15, 20, 24, 26, 32, 69–70, 72, 75, 78, 81, 84–9, 91–2, 111, 112, 119, 127, 133–4, 137, 142, 145–7, 155, 159, 163, 180–1
 Brown, Dean 103
 Brutents, Karen 170

 Camp David accords 118, 120, 122, 129, 141, 150, 158
 Carter, Jimmy 109, 111–12, 114, 116
 Chernenko, Konstantin U. 8, 21, 41, 58, 157–63
 Cuban military involvement in Syria 45

 Demchenko, Pavel 113, 155
 disengagement agreements 20, 21, 45, 53, 80–6, 90–6, 99–100, 113–15, 139, 150, 191 n10

 Egelburger, Lawrence 151
 Egypt 4–5, 8, 13–15, 20–2, 26–7, 30–1, 35–7, 39, 42, 44, 49, 50, 63, 67–77, 80–4, 87, 89–97, 100, 107, 110–11, 113–18, 121–2, 125, 127, 129, 137, 145, 150, 154, 157–8, 160, 163, 169, 174–6, 181
 Egypt–Israeli War of Attrition 50, 67, 106, 202–3 n48

 Fahmi, Ismail 90, 94
 Faranjieh, Suleiman 101, 104, 151
 Fedotov, Felix 161
 Fez summit (1982) 146, 150
 Ford, Gerald 95
 France 24–5, 88, 99, 161
 Front for Steadfastness and

- Confrontation 31, 47, 116–19,
123–4, 128, 199 n22
- Geneva conference 19, 20, 25,
87–9, 90–5, 97, 106, 109–14,
116–17, 133, 137, 146, 156,
160, 168–70, 172–3, 176, 181
- Geyvendov, Konstantin 171
- Gorbachev, Mikhail S. 7, 8, 21,
28, 33, 41, 48, 58–9, 163–79,
217–20
- Great Britain 88, 165
- Greater Syria 99, 196 n1
- Gromyko, Andrei A. 53, 83,
85–6, 89, 92, 109, 114, 116,
116, 122, 124, 136, 150, 154,
157, 168, 184 n16
- Gumayel, Amin 149–50, 156
- Gumayel, Bashir 140, 202 n39
- Habash, George 171
- Habib, Philip 131
- Hawatma, Naif 171
- Hizbollah 164
- Hussein, King of Jordan 66, 68,
93, 96, 128–9, 133–4, 149, 154,
161–2, 166, 168–9, 171
- Hussein, Saddam 59, 94, 121,
169, 171, 176
- international peace conference *see*
Geneva conference
- Iraq 3–4, 28, 30, 40, 59, 76, 89,
93–7, 103, 111, 116, 120–1,
124, 128, 135, 137, 140, 156,
158, 160, 166, 169, 171, 174–6
- Iran 1–3, 40, 42, 57, 59, 93, 124,
128, 156, 164–6, 168–9, 187
n62
- Iran–Iraq War 128, 156, 160, 164,
166, 168, 171, 175–6, 207 n18
- Islamic Conference Organization
(ICO) 123–4
- Israel 4, 13–22, 23, 27–8, 30–1,
33, 36–7, 40–2, 44–5, 66,
75–84, 86–93, 95–100, 102–3,
105, 107, 112–25, 129–53,
155–9, 161–8, 170, 172–6,
180–1
- Jadid, Salah 63, 66
- Jallud, Abd al-Salam 102
- Jarring, Gunnar 67, 69, 71
- Jordan 66–8, 89–90, 92–3, 95–6,
109, 124, 128–35, 149–50, 154,
157–8, 160–62, 169, 174
- Jumblatt, Walid 151, 164
- Kadoumi, Farouq 26, 150, 154
- Karami, Rashid 151
- Kasim, Abd al-Raouf 125–6, 129
- Kemal, Mustafa 2
- Khaddam, Abd al-Khalim 24, 31,
72, 77, 79, 81, 94, 100, 116,
118, 120, 125–6, 129, 136, 138,
145, 154–5, 168, 170
- Khair Allah, Adnan 120
- Khovrin, Nikolai 91
- Khulayfawi, Abd al-Rahman 54
- Kirilenko, Andrei 15
- Kissinger, Henry 14, 44, 75, 78,
80, 82, 85–7, 90–4, 109, 114,
184 n11
- Kornienko, Georgy 132–3
- Kosygin, Alexei N. 13, 85, 105–6
- Kulikov, Victor 94
- Kutakhov, Payel 70
- Kuznetsov, Vasily 24, 129
- Lebanese civil war 22–8, 99–108
- Lebanese–Israeli peace treaty
(1983) 148–51, 153, 156–7
- Lebanon 22–8, 39–40, 45–7, 50,
57, 96, 99–109, 112, 124,
131–5, 139–51, 153, 156–9,
161–2, 164, 166–7, 176–7, 181,
202 n39
- Lebanon war (1982) 27, 39–40,
45–7, 139–46, 202 n39
- Libya 47, 68, 102–3, 110, 124,
156, 165
- Lobov, Vladimir 170
- London incident (April 1986) 165,
167–8
- Makhous, Ibrahim 64
- Mitterrand, François 161
- Mukhidinov, Nuridin 64
- missile crisis (1981) 130–7, 140

- Missile crisis (1985–6) 165, 167, 206 n5
 Muslim Brotherhood 32, 121, 124, 128
 Nasser, Gamal Abd al- 4, 5, 67, 145
 Nixon, Richard 14, 15, 87–8, 109, 184 n11
 Numeiri, Ja'far 70
 October 1973 war 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 31, 37–8, 42–6, 53, 71, 74–6, 79, 81, 84, 87, 115, 144
 Ogarkov, Nikolai V. 132
 Operation Litani (1978) 140
 Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) 100–2
 Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) 22–3, 26–8, 61, 90, 92–4, 97–8, 100–4, 106–7, 110, 116, 124, 135, 139–42, 144, 149–50, 152–5, 158, 160–3, 160, 162, 164, 166, 168–71, 173–7, 181
 Peres, Shimon 93, 173
 Phalanges 130, 134–5, 140, 150
 Podgorny, Nikolai V. 8, 85
 Poland 138, 142
 Ponomarev, Bori 192 n1
 Rabat summit (1974) 90, 96
 Rabin, Yitzhak 93
 Reagan, Ronald 145–6, 148–50, 156–8, 162, 165, 169, 173, 203 n53
 Reagan plan 142, 145–6, 148–50, 156–8, 162, 169, 203 n53
 'red lines' in Lebanon 103, 130, 135, 140, 197 n12, 15, 206 n5
 Reza, Shah 2
 Ryuyte, Arnold 170
 Saadabad Pact 3
 Sabri, Ali 70
 Sadat, Anwar 8, 13, 14, 16, 37, 39, 50, 70–5, 89, 92–3, 95–6, 111, 113–18, 128–9
 Sa'iqa 66, 100–1
 San Clemente summit (June 1973) 14, 72
 Sarkis, Elias 26, 101, 104
 Saudi Arabia 26–7, 47, 110–11, 123, 145–6
 Security Council Resolution 242 13, 16, 17, 64, 68–9, 71, 76–7, 97–8, 117–18, 185 n18
 Security Council Resolution 338 76–7, 138, 192 n6
 Security Council Resolution 339 76
 Semyonov, Vladimir 16, 68–9
 Shamir, Yitzhak 137, 157
 Shara, Farouq al- 136, 161, 176
 Sharon, Ariel 136–8, 140, 202 n39
 Shevardnadze, Edward 176–7, 182
 Shihabi, Hikmat 116, 119–20
 Shultz, George 151, 166
 Six-Day War 12, 13, 17, 36, 52, 63, 76, 87, 144
 Soldatov, Alexander 134
 Soviet Union
 and Afghanistan 1, 3–4, 123–4, 142, 178, 181
 and Algeria 116
 and the Arab–Israeli conflict 7, 8, 12–22, 25, 68–9, 77–89, 93, 95, 97–8, 109, 112, 115–16, 127, 132–4, 137, 146, 160, 163–6, 168–9, 171–7, 179–82, 192 n6, 215–20
 and Arab–Israeli peace 16–17, 25–6, 64, 68–9, 77–81, 83–7, 95, 97, 112, 116–18, 127, 133–4, 157, 160, 164, 172–5, 177, 179–82, 192 n6, 215–20
 and the Arab world 2, 3, 4, 8, 22
 and the Baghdad Pact 3, 4
 and Egypt 4, 5, 13, 14–15, 20, 27, 30–1, 35–7, 39, 44, 49–50, 63, 67, 69–75, 80–1, 83–4, 87, 89–90, 92–7, 107, 110, 113–14, 116–18, 121–2, 129, 145,

- 157–8, 160, 163, 174, 181
- and Egyptian–Israeli war of attrition 106, 202–3 n48
- and Gulf states 163, 167
- and Iraq 4, 28, 30, 40, 59, 89, 94, 116, 120–1, 156, 158, 160, 166, 169, 171, 174
- and Iran 1–3, 40, 124, 156, 166, 168, 187 n62
- and Israel 16–17, 20, 21, 23, 27–8, 33, 40, 42, 44–5, 78–82, 84, 86, 88, 90–3, 95–6, 98, 102–3, 112–14, 116, 119–22, 129, 131–4, 137, 140–5, 147–8, 151, 153, 155, 157–9, 162–4, 167–8, 170, 172–4, 176, 180
- and Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights 137–9
- and Jordan 93, 128–31, 133, 141, 149–50, 157–8, 160, 162, 169, 174
- and Lebanon 22–8, 45–7, 50, 102–9, 112, 132–4, 140–2, 144–5, 147, 151, 153, 156–9, 162, 166–7, 177, 181
- and the Lebanese civil war 22–8, 102–8
- and the Lebanon war (1982) 27, 45–7, 50, 139–47, 157–9
- and Libya 110, 156
- and the missile crisis (1981) 130–7
- and the second missile crisis (1985–6) 28, 167
- and the October war 12–16, 20, 37–8, 42–6, 48, 50, 73, 74–6, 106, 144, 181, 184 n11, 16, 192 n1
- and the Palestinian question 88, 91, 111, 112, 114, 118, 141, 143, 157–8, 174, 176, 199 n23
- and the PLO 23, 26, 28, 94, 97–8, 102–4, 106, 110, 116, 141–2, 144, 149–50, 152–5, 158, 160–3, 166, 168–71, 173–7, 181
- and Saudi Arabia 27
- and Syria's 1970 intervention in Jordan 67–8, 129, 191 n10
- and Syria's military presence in Lebanon (1976–) 22–8, 102–8, 112, 132, 145, 153, 155, 162, 167
- and Syria's quest for strategic parity 21, 39, 41, 118–20, 122, 159, 166, 171–2, 176
- and the Syrian–Israeli war of attrition (1974) 20, 83–4
- and the Syrian–Jordanian crisis (November 1980) 128–31
- and the Third World 1, 29, 30, 34–5, 42, 69, 178
- and Turkey 1–4
- and the United States 8, 13–16, 21, 27–8, 32–3, 40, 50, 53, 67–8, 74–5, 77–9, 82–8, 90–1, 102–3, 106–7, 109–10, 112, 116, 129, 131–4, 136–8, 140, 142–5, 147, 149–56, 167, 169, 173, 178–80, 182
- economic aid to Syria 4–7, 52–9, 63, 69–70, 83–4, 89, 112, 119, 123, 133, 156, 159, 170
- Friendship and Cooperation Treaty 28–33, 55–6, 119–20, 123, 125–39, 145, 147–8, 153–5, 159, 167–8, 176, 212–14
- military support for Syria 4, 7, 20, 34–51, 69–70, 75, 81, 83–5, 88–9, 91, 94, 96–7, 112, 118–23, 127, 132–4, 142, 145, 158–60, 166–8, 170, 175–6
- nature of Middle East interest 1–4, 7–8, 12, 33, 51, 133, 143, 178–82
- new political thinking 175–9, 182, 218
- policy towards the Middle East 1–4, 7–8, 178–82
- Stalin, Joseph 3, 4
- Sudan 70, 72
- Suslov, Mikhail 192 n1
- Syria
 - and Algeria 47, 103
 - and the Arab–Israeli conflict 12–22, 64, 77–9, 81–2, 89–91, 93, 95–7, 117–18,

- 122-3, 136-9, 146, 175-6
- and China 36
- and Egypt 5, 8, 13-14, 21-2, 30, 36-7, 39, 68, 71-2, 74, 76-7, 82, 89-92, 95-6, 100, 110-11, 113-15, 118, 121, 125, 127, 150, 175-6
- and the Geneva conference 20, 25, 59, 76-8, 82-3, 89-91, 92-4, 97, 106, 110-12, 117, 156, 160, 168-70, 181
- and France 24-5, 88, 99, 161
- and Great Britain 88, 165
- and Iraq 4, 59, 76, 95-7, 103, 111, 120-1, 124, 128, 140, 160, 166, 169, 171, 175-6
- and Iran 42, 57, 59, 124, 128, 156, 164, 166, 168, 169
- and Israel 4, 13, 15, 17-22, 27, 30, 36, 40-1, 66, 75, 77-9, 81-3, 86-7, 90-3, 95-7, 99-100, 102-3, 105, 113-14, 115-18, 120-1, 123-5, 130-6, 138-46, 148-52, 156, 158, 161, 165-6, 175, 181
- and Jordan 66-8, 90, 92-3, 95-6, 109, 124, 128-30, 149, 154, 158, 164, 168-9, 171
- and Lebanon 22-28, 57, 96, 99-109, 124, 131-5, 139-46, 148-53, 156, 161, 164, 167, 176-7, 181
- and Lebanon war (1982) 139-46
- and Libya 47, 68, 103
- and the Palestinian question 17-19, 77, 81, 91, 93, 97, 99, 110, 158
- and the PLO 22-3, 26-7, 90, 92-3, 98, 100-1, 107, 110, 124, 135, 139-40, 149, 152-5, 158, 160, 162, 164, 166, 168, 170-1, 175-7
- and Saudi Arabia 27, 47, 110-1, 123, 145-6
- and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan 123-4
- and Sudan 68
- and Turkey 4
- and the United States 20-1, 25, 28, 31, 53-5, 58, 66, 78, 82, 84-5, 87, 89-93, 95-7, 102-3, 105, 110-13, 121-5, 136, 138, 145-6, 148-9, 152, 156, 158, 161, 165-6
- and Western Europe 54-5, 58, 63, 78, 87-8, 161, 165-6
- communist party 5, 63-5, 66, 68-9
- domestic problems 4, 5, 30, 41, 121-2, 124, 128, 135, 157, 164
- economy 7, 41, 42, 52-9, 63, 87-8, 156, 154, 170, 190 n11
- Friendship and Cooperation Treaty 28-33, 55-6, 118-20, 123, 125-6, 129-30, 132, 134-5, 136-9, 145, 212-14
- military intervention in Jordan (1970) 66-8, 191 n9
- military potential 36-43
- war of attrition (1974) 10, 45, 83-4
- Tekoah, Yosef 16
- Tlas, Mustafa 36, 64, 67, 70, 112, 132, 136, 176-7
- Tolkunov, Lev 90
- Truman Doctrine 3
- Turkey 1, 2, 3, 4
- United Nations Disengagement Observers Force (UNDOF) 91-2, 97-8
- United States 2, 3, 8, 13-16, 20-1, 25, 27-8, 31-3, 37, 40, 50, 53-5, 58, 66-8, 74-5, 77-9, 80, 82-8, 90-7, 102-3, 105-7, 109-13, 116, 119, 121-5, 128-9, 131-4, 136-8, 142-6, 148-56, 158, 161, 165-7, 169, 173, 178-80, 182
- US-Israeli memorandum of strategic understanding 136-8
- Vance-Gromyko Statement (1977) 109, 114, 116
- Vance, Cyrus 109, 113-14, 116

- | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Vinogradov, Sergei | 74 | Yazov, Dimitry | 177 |
| Vinogradov, Vladimir | 93, 172,
186 n50 | Yurasov, Yevgeny | 46 |
| Vorontsov, Yuly | 174 | Zahla | 130, 134–5, 140 |
| Weinberger, Caspar | 140 | Zotov, Alexander | 177 |
| | | Zu'ayyin, Yusuf | 64 |